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Portrait Edition

English Men of Letters

EDITED BY
JOHN MORLEY

IX.

CHAUCER. BY ADOLPHUS WILLIAM WARD

LAMB. BY ALFRED AINGER

DE QUINCEY. BY DAVID MASSON

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ENGLISH MEN OF LETTERS.

EDITED BY JOHN MORLEY.

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XIII.

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CHAUCER

BY

ADOLPHUS WILLIAM WARD

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NOTE.

THE peculiar conditions of this essay must be left to explain themselves. It could not have been written at all without the aid of the Publications of the Chaucer Society, and more especially of the labours of the Society's Director, Mr. Furnivall. To other recent writers on Chaucer—including Mr. Fleay, from whom I never differ but with hesitation—I have referred, in so far as it was in my power to do so. Perhaps I may take this opportunity of expressing a wish that Pauli's *History of England*, a work beyond the compliment of an acknowledgment, were accessible to every English reader.

A. W. W.

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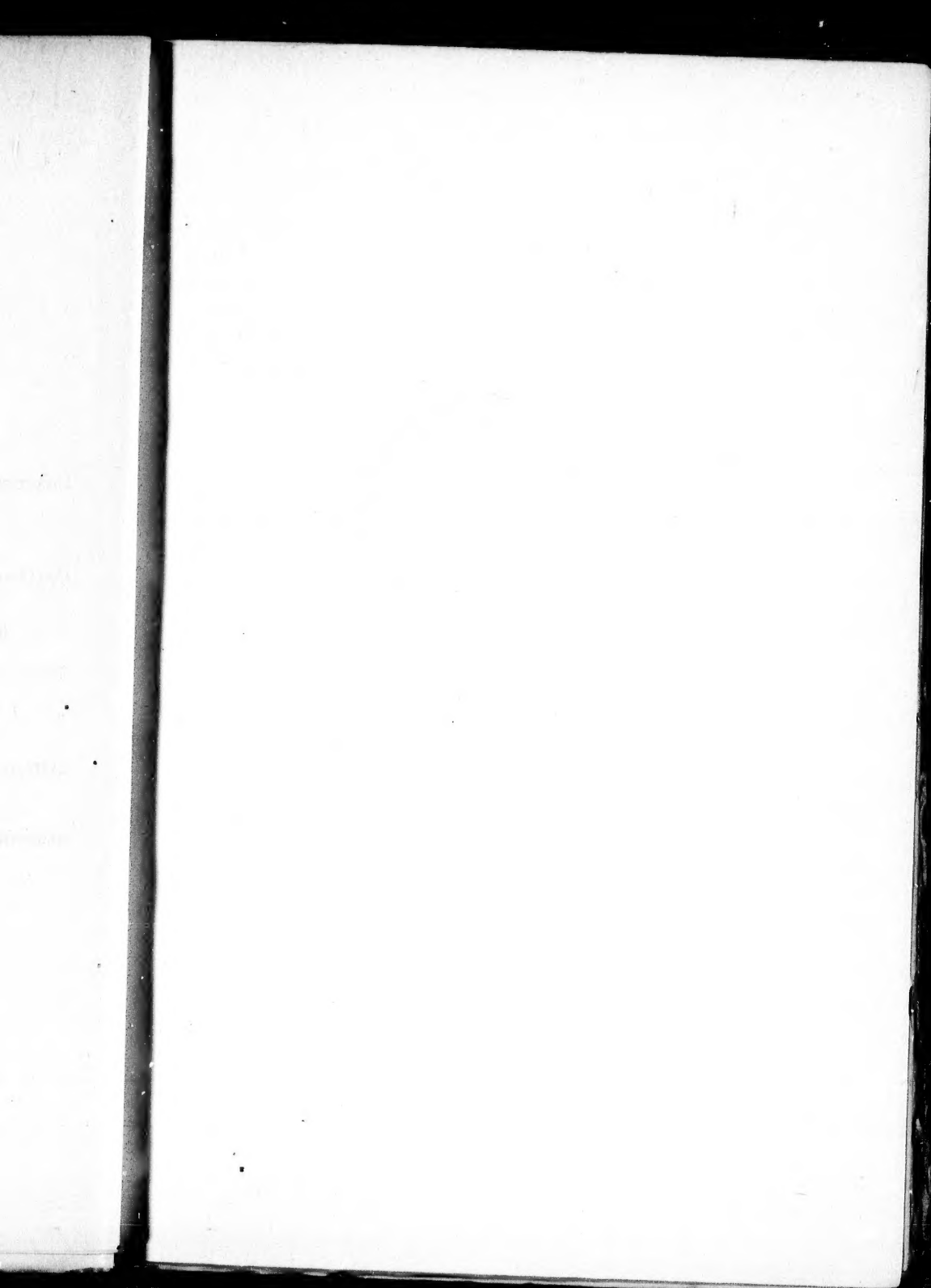
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CHAUCER.

CHAPTER I.

CHAUCER'S TIMES.

THE biography of Geoffrey Chaucer is no longer a mixture of unsifted facts, and of more or less hazardous conjectures. Many and wide as are the gaps in our knowledge concerning the course of his outer life, and doubtful as many important passages of it remain—in vexatious contrast with the certainty of other relatively insignificant *data*—we have at least become aware of the foundations on which alone a trustworthy account of it can be built. These foundations consist partly of a meagre though gradually increasing array of external evidence, chiefly to be found in public documents—in the Royal Wardrobe Book, the Issue Rolls of the Exchequer, the Customs Rolls, and such-like records—partly of the conclusions which may be drawn with confidence from the internal evidence of the poet's own indisputably genuine works, together with a few references to him in the writings of his contemporaries or immediate successors. Which of his works are to be accepted as genuine, necessarily forms the subject of an antecedent enquiry, such as cannot with any degree of

safety be conducted except on principles far from infallible with regard to all the instances to which they have been applied, but now accepted by the large majority of competent scholars. Thus, by a process which is in truth dullness and dryness itself, except to patient endeavour stimulated by the enthusiasm of special literary research, a limited number of results has been safely established, and others have, at all events, been placed beyond reasonable doubt. Around a third series of conclusions or conjectures the tempest of controversy still rages; and even now it needs a wary step to pass without fruitless deviations through a maze of assumptions consecrated by their longevity, or commended to sympathy by the fervour of personal conviction.

A single instance must suffice to indicate both the difficulty and the significance of many of those questions of Chaucerian biography which, whether interesting or not in themselves, have to be determined before Chaucer's life can be written. They are not, "all and some," mere antiquarians' puzzles, of interest only to those who have leisure and inclination for microscopic enquiries. So with the point immediately in view. It has been said with much force that Tyrwhitt, whose services to the study of Chaucer remain uneclipsed by those of any other scholar, would have composed a quite different biography of the poet, had he not been confounded by the formerly (and here and there still) accepted date of Chaucer's birth, the year 1328. For the correctness of this date Tyrwhitt "supposed" the poet's tombstone in Westminster Abbey to be the voucher; but the slab placed on a pillar near his grave (it is said at the desire of Caxton) appears to have merely borne a Latin inscription without any dates; and the marble monument erected in its stead, "in the name of the Muses," by Nico-

las Brigham in 1556, while giving October 25th, 1400, as the day of Chaucer's death, makes no mention either of the date of his birth or of the number of years to which he attained, and, indeed, promises no more information than it gives. That Chaucer's contemporary, the poet Gower, should have referred to him in the year 1392 as "now in his days old," is at best a very vague sort of testimony, more especially as it is by mere conjecture that the year of Gower's own birth is placed as far back as 1320. Still less weight can be attached to the circumstance that another poet, Occleve, who clearly regarded himself as the disciple of one by many years his senior, in accordance with the common phraseology of his (and, indeed, of other) times, spoke of the older writer as his "father" and "father reverent." In a coloured portrait carefully painted from memory by Occleve on the margin of a manuscript, Chaucer is represented with grey hair and beard; but this could not of itself be taken to contradict the supposition that he died about the age of sixty. And Leland's assertion that Chaucer attained to old age self-evidently rests on tradition only; for Leland was born more than a century after Chaucer died. Nothing occurring in any of Chaucer's own works of undisputed genuineness throws any real light on the subject. His poem, the *House of Fame*, has been variously dated; but at any period of his manhood he might have said, as he says there, that he was "too old" to learn astronomy, and preferred to take his science on faith. In the curious lines called *L'Envoy de Chaucer à Scogan*, the poet, while blaming his friend for his want of perseverance in a love-suit, classes himself among "them that be hoar and round of shape," and speaks of himself and his Muse as out of date and rusty. But there seems no sufficient reason for removing

the date of the composition of these lines to an earlier year than 1393; and poets as well as other men since Chaucer have spoken of themselves as old and obsolete at fifty. A similar remark might be made concerning the reference to the poet's old age, "which dulleth him in his spirit," in the *Complaint of Venus*, generally ascribed to the last decennium of Chaucer's life. If we reject the evidence of a further passage, in the *Cuckoo and the Nightingale*, a poem of disputed genuineness, we accordingly arrive at the conclusion that there is no reason for demurring to the only direct external evidence in existence as to the date of Chaucer's birth. At a famous trial of a cause of chivalry held at Westminster in 1386, Chaucer, who had gone through part of a campaign with one of the litigants, appeared as a witness; and on this occasion his age was, doubtless on his own deposition, recorded as that of a man "of forty years and upwards," who had borne arms for twenty-seven years. A careful enquiry into the accuracy of the record as to the ages of the numerous other witnesses at the same trial has established it in an overwhelming majority of instances; and it is absurd gratuitously to charge Chaucer with having understated his age from motives of vanity. The conclusion, therefore, seems to remain unshaken, that he was born about the year 1340, or some time between that year and 1345.

Now, we possess a charming poem by Chaucer called the *Assembly of Fowls*, elaborately courtly in its conception, and in its execution giving proofs of Italian reading on the part of its author, as well as of a ripe humour such as is rarely an accompaniment of extreme youth. This poem has been thought by earlier commentators to allegorise an event known to have happened in 1358; by later critics, another which occurred in 1364. Clearly, the as-

sumption that the period from 1340 to 1345 includes the date of Chaucer's birth suffices of itself to stamp the one of these conjectures as untenable, and the other as improbable, and (when the style of the poem and treatment of its subject are taken into account) adds weight to the other reasons in favour of the date 1381 for the poem in question. Thus, backwards and forwards, the disputed points in Chaucer's biography and the question of his works are affected by one another.

Chaucer's life, then, spans rather more than the latter half of the fourteenth century, the last year of which was indisputably the year of his death. In other words, it covers rather more than the interval between the most glorious epoch of Edward III.'s reign—for Crecy was fought in 1346—and the downfall, in 1399, of his unfortunate successor Richard II.

The England of this period was but a little land, if numbers be the test of greatness; but in Edward III.'s time, as in that of Henry V., who inherited so much of Edward's policy and revived so much of his glory, there stirred in this little body a mighty heart. It is only of a small population that the author of the *Vision concerning Piers Plowman* could have gathered the representatives into a single field, or that Chaucer himself could have composed a family picture fairly comprehending, though not altogether exhausting, the chief national character-types. In the year of King Richard II.'s accession (1377), according to a trustworthy calculation based upon the result of that year's poll-tax, the total number of the inhabitants of England seems to have been two millions and a

half. A quarter of a century earlier—in the days of Chaucer's boyhood—their numbers had been perhaps twice as large. For not less than four great pestilences (in 1348-9, 1361-2, 1369, and 1375-6) had swept over the land, and at least one-half of its population, including two-thirds of the inhabitants of the capital, had been carried off by the ravages of the obstinate epidemic—"the foul death of England," as it was called in a formula of execration in use among the people. In this year—1377—London, where Chaucer was doubtless born as well as bred, where the greater part of his life was spent, and where the memory of his name is one of those associations which seem familiarly to haunt the banks of the historic river from Thames Street to Westminster, apparently numbered not more than 35,000 souls. But if, from the nature of the case, no place was more exposed than London to the inroads of the Black Death, neither was any other so likely elastically to recover from them. For the reign of Edward III. had witnessed a momentous advance in the prosperity of the capital—an advance reflecting itself in the outward changes introduced during the same period into the architecture of the city. Its wealth had grown larger as its houses had grown higher; and mediæval London, such as we are apt to picture it to ourselves, seems to have derived those leading features which it so long retained, from the days when Chaucer, with downcast but very observant eyes, passed along its streets between Billingsgate and Aldgate. Still, here as elsewhere in England, the remembrance of the most awful physical visitations which have ever befallen the country must have long lingered; and, after all has been said, it is wonderful that the traces of them should be so exceedingly scanty in Chaucer's pages. Twice only in his poems does he refer to the Plague: once in

an allegorical fiction which is of Italian if not of French origin, and where, therefore, no special reference to the ravages of the disease in *England* may be intended when Death is said to have "a thousand slain this pestilence"—

" . . . He hath slain this year
Hence over a mile, within a great villáge
Both men and women, child and hind and page."

The other allusion is a more than half humorous one. It occurs in the description of the *Doctor of Physic*, the grave graduate in purple surcoat and blue white-furred hood; nor, by the way, may this portrait itself be altogether without its use as throwing some light on the helplessness of fourteenth-century medical science. For though in all the world there was none like this doctor to *speak* of physic and of surgery; though he was a very perfect practitioner, and never at a loss for telling the cause of any malady and for supplying the patient with the appropriate drug, sent in by the doctor's old and faithful friends the apothecaries; though he was well versed in all the authorities from *Æsculapius* to the writer of the *Rosa Anglica* (who cures inflammation homœopathically by the use of red draperies); though, like a truly wise physician, he began at home by caring anxiously for his own digestion and for his peace of mind ("his study was but little in the Bible")—yet the basis of his scientific knowledge was "astronomy," *i. e.*, astrology, "the better part of medicine," as Roger Bacon calls it; together with that "natural magic" by which, as Chaucer elsewhere tells us, the famous among the learned have known how to make men whole or sick. And there was one specific which, from a double point of view, Chaucer's Doctor of Physic esteemed very highly, and was loth to part with on frivo-

lous pretexts. He was but easy (*i. e.*, slack) of "dis-
pence":—

"He keptð that he won in pestilence.
For gold in physio is a cordial;
Therefore he lovèd gold in spécial."

Meanwhile the ruling classes seem to have been left untouched in heart by these successive ill-met and ill-guarded trials, which had first smitten the lower orders chiefly, then the higher with the lower (if the Plague of 1349 had swept off an archbishop, that of 1361 struck down, among others, Henry, Duke of Lancaster, the father of Chaucer's Duchess Blanche). Calamities such as these would assuredly have been treated as warnings sent from on high, both in earlier times, when a Church better braced for the due performance of its never-ending task, eagerly interpreted to awful ears the signs of the wrath of God, and by a later generation, leavened in spirit by the self-searching morality of Puritanism. But from the sorely-tried third quarter of the fourteenth century the solitary voice of Langland cries, as the voice of Conscience preaching with her cross, that "these pestilences" are the penalty of sin and of naught else. It is assuredly presumptuous for one generation, without the fullest proof, to accuse another of thoughtlessness or heartlessness; and though the classes for which Chaucer mainly wrote, and with which he mainly felt, were in all probability as little inclined to improve the occasions of the Black Death as the middle classes of the present day would be to fall on their knees after a season of commercial ruin, yet signs are not wanting that in the later years of the fourteenth century words of admonition came to be not unfrequently spoken. The portents of the eventful year 1382 called forth moralisings in English verse, and the pestilence of 1391 a rhymed lamentation in

Latin; and at different dates in King Richard's reign, the poet Gower, Chaucer's contemporary and friend, inveighed both in Latin and in English, from his conservative point of view, against the corruption and sinfulness of society at large. But by this time the great peasant insurrection had added its warning, to which it was impossible to remain deaf.

A self-confident nation, however, is slow to betake itself to sackcloth and ashes. On the whole, it is clear that though the last years of Edward III. were a season of failure and disappointment—though from the period of the First Pestilence onwards the signs increase of the King's unpopularity and of the people's discontent—yet the overburdened and enfeebled nation was brought almost as slowly as the King himself to renounce the proud position of a conquering power. In 1363 he had celebrated the completion of his fiftieth year; and three suppliant kings had at that time been gathered as satellites round the sun of his success. By 1371 he had lost all his allies, and nearly all the conquests gained by himself and the valiant Prince of Wales; and during the years remaining to him his subjects hated his rule and angrily assailed his favourites. From being a conquering power the English monarchy was fast sinking into an island which found it difficult to defend its own shores. There were times towards the close of Edward's, and early in his successor's reign, when matters would have gone hard with English traders, naturally desirous of having their money's worth for their subsidy of tonnage and poundage, and anxious, like their type the *Merchant* in Chaucer, that "the sea were kept for anything" between Middleburgh and Harwich, had not some of them, such as the Londoner, John Philpot, occasionally armed and manned a squadron of ships on their own ac-

count, in defiance of red tape and its censures. But in the days when Chaucer and the generation with which he grew up were young, the ardour of foreign conquest had not yet died out in the land, and clergy and laity cheerfully co-operated in bearing the burdens which military glory has at all times brought with it for a civilised people. The high spirit of the English nation, at a time when the decline in its fortunes was already near at hand (1366), is evident from the answer given to the application from Rome for the arrears of thirty-three years of the tribute promised by King John, or rather from what must unmistakably have been the drift of that answer. Its terms are unknown, but the demand was never afterwards repeated.

The power of England, in the period of an ascendancy to which she so tenaciously sought to cling, had not been based only upon the valour of her arms. Our country was already a rich one in comparison with most others in Europe. Other purposes besides that of providing good cheer for a robust generation were served by the wealth of her great landed proprietors, and of the "worthy vavasours" (smaller land-owners) who, like Chaucer's *Franklin*—a very Saint Julian or pattern of hospitality—knew not what it was to be "without baked meat in the house," where their

"Tables dormant in the hall alway
Stood ready covered all the longë day."

From this source, and from the well-filled coffers of the traders, came the laity's share of the expenses of those foreign wars which did so much to consolidate national feeling in England. The foreign companies of merchants long contrived to retain the chief share of the banking business and export trade assigned to them by the shortsighted commercial policy of Edward III., and the weaving

and fishing industries of Hanseatic and Flemish immigrants had established an almost unbearable competition in our own ports and towns. But the active import trade, which already connected England with both nearer and remoter parts of Christendom, must have been largely in native hands; and English chivalry, diplomacy, and literature followed in the lines of the trade-routes to the Baltic and the Mediterranean. Our mariners, like their type the *Shipman* in Chaucer (an anticipation of the "Venturer" of later days, with the pirate as yet, perhaps, more strongly marked in him than the patriot),

". . . Knew well all the havens, as they were
From Gothland, to the Cape of Finisterre,
And every creek in Brittany and Spain."

Doubtless, as may be noticed in passing, much of the tendency on the part of our shipmen in this period to self-help, in offence as well as in defence, was due to the fact that the mercantile navy was frequently employed in expeditions of war, vessels and men being at times seized or impressed for the purpose by order of the Crown. On one of these occasions the port of Dartmouth, whence Chaucer at a venture ("for aught I wot") makes his *Shipman* hail, is found contributing a larger total of ships and men than any other port in England. For the rest, Flanders was certainly still far ahead of her future rival in wealth and in mercantile and industrial activity; as a manufacturing country she had no equal, and in trade the rival she chiefly feared was still the German Hansa. Chaucer's *Merchant* characteristically wears a 'Flandrish beaver hat;' and it is no accident that the scene of the *Pardoner's Tale*, which begins with a description of "superfluity abominable," is laid in Flanders. In England,

indeed, the towns never came to domineer as they did in the Netherlands. Yet, since no trading country will long submit to be ruled by the landed interest only, so in proportion as the English towns, and London especially, grew richer, their voices were listened to in the settlement of the affairs of the nation. It might be very well for Chaucer to close the description of his *Merchant* with what looks very much like a fashionable writer's half sneer:—

“Forsooth, he was a worthy man withal;
But, truly, I wot not how men him call.”

Yet not only was high political and social rank reached by individual “merchant princes,” such as the wealthy William de la Pole, a descendant of whom is said (though on unsatisfactory evidence) to have been Chaucer's granddaughter, but the government of the country came to be very perceptibly influenced by the class from which they sprang. On the accession of Richard II., two London citizens were appointed controllers of the war-subsidies granted to the Crown; and in the Parliament of 1382 a committee of fourteen merchants refused to entertain the question of a merchants' loan to the King. The importance and self-consciousness of the smaller tradesmen and handicraftsmen increased with that of the great merchants. When, in 1393, King Richard II. marked the termination of his quarrel with the City of London by a stately procession through “new Troy,” he was welcomed, according to the Friar who has commemorated the event in Latin verse, by the trades in an array resembling an angelic host; and among the crafts enumerated we recognise several of those represented in Chaucer's company of pilgrims—by the *Carpenter*, the *Webbe* (Weaver), and the *Dyer*, all clothed

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“ . . . In one livery
Of a solémn and great fraternity.”

The middle class, in short, was learning to hold up its head, collectively and individually. The historical original of Chaucer's *Host*—the actual Master Harry Bailly, vintner and landlord of the Tabard Inn in Southwark, was likewise a member of Parliament, and very probably felt as sure of himself in real life as the mimic personage bearing his name does in its fictitious reproduction. And he and his fellows, the “poor and simple Commons”—for so humble was the style they were wont to assume in their addresses to the sovereign—began to look upon themselves, and to be looked upon, as a power in the State. The London traders and handicraftsmen knew what it was to be well-to-do citizens, and if they had failed to understand it, home monition would have helped to make it clear to them:—

“ Well seemèd each of them a fair burgéss,
For sitting in a guildhall on a dais.
And each one for the wisdom that he can
Was shapely for to be an alderman.
They had enough of chattels and of rent,
And very gladly would their wives assent;
And, truly, else they had been much to blame.
It is full fair to be yclept *maddme*,
And fair to go to vigils all before,
And have a mantle royally y-bore.”

The English State had ceased to be the feudal monarchy—the ramification of contributory courts and camps—of the crude days of William the Conqueror and his successors. The Norman lords and their English dependents no longer formed two separate elements in the body-politic. In the great French wars of Edward III., the

English armies had no longer mainly consisted of the baronial levies. The nobles had indeed, as of old, ridden into battle at the head of their vassals and retainers; but the body of the force had been made up of Englishmen serving for pay, and armed with their national implement, the bow—such as Chaucer's *Yeoman* carried with him on the ride to Canterbury:—

“A sheaf of peacock arrows bright and keen
Under his belt he bare full thriftily.
Well could he dress his tackle yeomanly:
His arrows drooped not with feathers low,
And in his hand he bare a mighty bow.”

The use of the bow was specially favoured by both Edward III. and his successor; and when, early in the next century, the chivalrous Scottish king, James I. (of whom mention will be made among Chaucer's poetic disciples) returned from his long English captivity to his native land, he had no more eager care than that his subjects should learn to emulate the English in the handling of their favourite weapon. Chaucer seems to be unable to picture an army without it, and we find him relating how, from ancient Troy,

“Hector and many a worthy wight out went
With spear in hand, and with their big bows bent.”

No wonder that when the battles were fought by the people itself, and when the cost of the wars was to so large an extent defrayed by its self-imposed contributions, the Scottish and French campaigns should have called forth that national enthusiasm which found an echo in the songs of Lawrence Minot, as hearty war-poetry as has been composed in any age of our literature. They were put forth in 1352, and considering the unusual popularity they are

said to have enjoyed, it is not impossible that they may have reached Chaucer's ears in his boyhood.

Before the final collapse of the great King's fortunes, and his death in a dishonoured old age, the ambition of his heir, the proudest hope of both dynasty and nation, had overleapt itself, and the Black Prince had preceded his father to the tomb. The good ship England (so sang a contemporary poet) was left without rudder or helm; and in a kingdom full of faction and discontent, the future of the Plantagenet throne depended on a child. While the young king's ambitious uncle, John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster (Chaucer's patron), was in nominal retirement, and his academical ally, Wyclif, was gaining popularity as the mouthpiece of the resistance to the papal demands, there were fermenting beneath the surface elements of popular agitation, which had been but little taken into account by the political factions of Edward the Third's reign, and by that part of its society with which Chaucer was more especially connected. But the multitude, whose turn, in truth, comes but rarely in the history of a nation, must every now and then make itself heard, although poets may seem all but blind and deaf to the tempest as it rises, and bursts, and passes away. Many causes had concurred to excite the insurrection which temporarily destroyed the influence of John of Gaunt, and which for long cast a deep shade upon the effects of the teaching of Wyclif. The acquisition of a measure of rights and power by the middle classes had caused a general swaying upwards; and throughout the peoples of Europe floated those dreams and speculations concerning the equality and fraternity of all men, which needed but a stimulus and an opportunity to assume the practical shape of a revolution. The melancholy thought which pervades Langland's *Vision*

is still that of the helplessness of the poor; and the remedy to which he looks against the corruption of the governing classes is the advent of a superhuman king, whom he identifies with the ploughman himself, the representative of suffering humility. But about the same time as that of the composition of this poem—or not long afterwards—Wyclif had sent forth among the people his “simple priests,” who illustrated by contrast the conflict which his teaching exposed between the existing practice of the Church and the original documents of her faith. The connexion between Wyclif’s teaching and the peasants’ insurrection under Richard II. is as undeniable as that between Luther’s doctrines and the great social uprising in Germany a century and a half afterwards. When, upon the declaration of the Papal Schism, Wyclif abandoned all hope of a reform of the Church from within, and, defying the injunctions of foe and friend alike, entered upon a course of theological opposition, the popular influence of his followers must have tended to spread a theory admitting of very easy application *ad hominem*—the theory, namely, that the tenure of all offices, whether spiritual or temporal, is justified only by the personal fitness of their occupants. With such levelling doctrine, the Socialism of popular preachers like John Balle might seem to coincide with sufficient closeness; and since worthiness was not to be found in the holders of either spiritual or temporal authority, of either ecclesiastical or lay wealth, the time had palpably come for the poor man to enjoy his own again. Then, the advent of a weak government, over which a powerful kinsman of the King and unconcealed adversary of the Church was really seeking to recover the control, and the imposition of a tax coming home to all men except actual beggars, and filling serfdom’s cup of bitterness

to overflowing, supplied the opportunity, and the insurrection broke out. Its violence fell short of that of the French *Jacquerie* a quarter of a century earlier; but no doubt could exist as to its critical importance. As it happened, the revolt turned with special fury against the possessions of the Duke of Lancaster, whose sympathies with the cause of ecclesiastical reform it definitively extinguished.

After the suppression of this appalling movement by a party of Order, comprehending in it all who had anything to lose, a period of reaction ensued. In the reign of Richard II., whichever faction might be in the ascendant, and whatever direction the King's own sympathies may have originally taken, the last state of the peasantry was without doubt worse than the first. Wycliffism as an influence rapidly declined with the death of Wyclif himself, as it hardly could but decline, considering the absence from his teaching of any tangible system of Church government; and Lollardry came to be the popular name, or nickname, for any and every form of dissent from the existing system. Finally, Henry of Lancaster, John of Gaunt's son, mounted the throne as a sort of saviour of society—a favourite character for usurpers to pose in before the applauding assemblage of those who claim "a stake in the country." Chaucer's contemporary, Gower, whose wisdom was of the kind which goes with the times, who was in turn a flatterer of Richard and (by the simple expedient of a revised second edition of his *magnum opus*) a flatterer of Henry, offers better testimony than Chaucer to the conservatism of the upper classes of his age, and to the single-minded anxiety for the good times when

"Justice of law is held;
The privilege of royalty

Is safe, and all the barony
 Worshippèd is in its estate.
 The people stands in obeisance
 Under the rule of governance."

Chaucer is less explicit, and may have been too little of a politician by nature to care for preserving an outward consistency in his incidental remarks concerning the lower classes. In his *Clerk's Tale* he finds room for a very dubious commonplace about the "stormy people," its levity, untruthfulness, indiscretion, fickleness, and garrulity, and the folly of putting any trust in it. In his *Nun's Priest's Tale* he further enlivens one of the liveliest descriptions of a hue-and-cry ever put upon paper by a direct reference to the Peasants' Rebellion:—

"So hideous was the noise, ah *bencité*!
 That of a truth Jack Straw, and his meinie
 Not madë never shoutës half so shrill,
 When that they any Fleming meant to kill."

Assuredly, again, there is an unmistakeably conservative tone in the *Ballad* purporting to have been sent by him to *King Richard*, with its refrain as to all being "lost for want of steadfastness," and its admonition to its sovereign to

"... Shew forth the sword of castigation."

On the other hand, it would be unjust to leave unnoticed the passage, at once powerful and touching, in the so-called *Parson's Tale* (the sermon which closes the *Canterbury Tales* as Chaucer left them), in which certain lords are reproached for taking of their bondmen *amercements*, "which might more reasonably be called extortions than *amercements*," while lords in general are commanded to be good to their thralls (serfs), because "those that they clept

thralls, be God's people; for humble folks be Christ's friends; they be contubernially with the Lord." The solitary type, however, of the labouring man proper which Chaucer, in manifest remembrance of Langland's allegory, produces, is one which, beautiful and affecting as it is, has in it a flavour of the comfortable sentiment, that things are as they should be. This is—not, of course, the *Parson* himself, of which most significant character hereafter, but—the *Parson's* brother, the *Ploughman*. He is a true labourer and a good, religious and charitable in his life, and always ready to pay his tithes. In short, he is a true Christian, but, at the same time, the ideal rather than the prototype, if one may so say, of the conservative working man.

Such were some, though of course some only, of the general currents of English public life in the latter half—Chaucer's half—of the fourteenth century. Its social features were naturally in accordance with the course of the national history. In the first place, the slow and painful process of amalgamation between the Normans and the English was still unfinished, though the reign of Edward III. went far towards completing what had rapidly advanced since the reigns of John and Henry III. By the middle of the fourteenth century English had become, or was just becoming, the common tongue of the whole nation. Among the political poems and songs preserved from the days of Edward III. and Richard II., not a single one composed on English soil is written in French. Parliament was opened by an English speech in the year 1363, and in the previous year the proceedings in the law courts were ordered to be conducted in the native tongue. Yet when Chaucer wrote his *Canterbury Tales*, it seems still to have continued the pedantic affectation of

a profession for its members, like Chaucer's *Man of Law*, to introduce French law-terms into common conversation; so that it is natural enough to find the *Summoner* following suit, and interlarding his *Tale* with the Latin scraps picked up by him from the decrees and pleadings of the ecclesiastical courts. Meanwhile, manifold difficulties had delayed or interfered with the fusion between the two races, before the victory of the English language showed this fusion to have been in substance accomplished. One of these difficulties, which has been sometimes regarded as fundamental, has doubtless been exaggerated by national feeling on either side; but that it existed is not to be denied. Already in those ages the national character and temperament of French and English differed largely from one another; though the reasons why they so differed remain a matter of argument. In a dialogue, dated from the middle of the fourteenth century, the French interlocutor attributes this difference to the respective national beverages: "*We* are nourished with the pure juice of the grape, while naught but the dregs is sold to the English, who will take anything for liquor that is liquid." The case is put with scarcely greater politeness by a living French critic of high repute, according to whom the English, still weighted down by Teutonic phlegm, were drunken gluttons, agitated at intervals by poetic enthusiasm, while the Normans, on the other hand, lightened by their transplantation, and by the admixture of a variety of elements, already found the claims of *esprit* developing themselves within them. This is an explanation which explains nothing—least of all, the problem: why the lively strangers should have required the contact with insular phlegm in order to receive the creative impulse—why, in other words, Normau-French literature should have derived so enormous

an advantage from the transplantation of Normans to English ground. But the evil days when the literary labours of Englishmen had been little better than bond-service to the tastes of their foreign masters had passed away, since the Norman barons had, from whatever motive, invited the commons of England to take a share with them in the national councils. After this, the question of the relations between the two languages, and the wider one of the relations between the two nationalities, could only be decided by the peaceable adjustment of the influences exercised by the one side upon the other. The Norman noble, his ideas, and the expression they found in forms of life and literature, had henceforth, so to speak, to stand on their merits; the days of their dominion, as a matter of course, had passed away.

Together with not a little of their political power, the Norman nobles of Chaucer's time had lost something of the traditions of their order. Chivalry had not quite come to an end with the Crusades; but it was a difficult task to maintain all its laws, written and unwritten, in these degenerate days. No laurels were any longer to be gained in the Holy Land; and though the campaigns of the great German Order against the pagans of Prussia and Lithuania attracted the service of many an English knight—in the middle of the century, Henry, Duke of Lancaster, fought there, as his grandson, afterwards King Henry IV., did forty years later—yet the substitute was hardly adequate in kind. Of the great mediæval companies of Knights, the most famous had, early in the century, perished under charges which were undoubtedly in the main foul fictions, but at the same time were only too much in accord with facts betokening an unmistakeable decay of the true spirit of chivalry; before the century closed, lawyers were rolling

parchments in the halls of the Templars by the Thames. Thus, though the age of chivalry had not yet ended, its supremacy was already on the wane, and its ideal was growing dim. In the history of English chivalry the reign of Edward III. is memorable, not only for the foundation of our most illustrious order of knighthood, but likewise for many typical acts of knightly valour and courtesy, as well on the part of the King when in his better days, as on that of his heroic son. Yet it cannot be by accident that an undefinable air of the old-fashioned clings to that most delightful of all Chaucer's character sketches, the *Knight of the Canterbury Tales*. His warlike deeds at Alexandria, in Prussia, and elsewhere, may be illustrated from those of more than one actual knight of the times; and the whole description of him seems founded on one by a French poet of King John of Bohemia, who had at least the external features of a knight of the old school. The chivalry, however, which was in fashion as the century advanced, was one outwardly far removed from the sturdy simplicity of Chaucer's *Knight*, and inwardly often rotten in more than one vital part. In show and splendour a higher point was probably reached in Edward III.'s than in any preceding reign. The extravagance in dress which prevailed in this period is too well known a characteristic of it to need dwelling upon. Sumptuary laws in vain sought to restrain this foible; and it rose to such a pitch as even to oblige men, lest they should be precluded from indulging in gorgeous raiment, to abandon hospitality, a far more amiable species of excess. When the kinds of clothing respectively worn by the different classes served as distinctions of rank, the display of splendour in one class could hardly fail to provoke emulation in the others. The long-lived English love for "crying" colours shows

itself amusingly enough in the early pictorial representations of several of Chaucer's Canterbury pilgrims, though in floridity of apparel, as of speech, the youthful *Squire* bears away the bell:—

“Embroidered was he, as it were a mead
All full of freshest flowers, white and red.”

But of the artificiality and extravagance of the costumes of these times we have direct contemporary evidence, and loud contemporary complaints. Now, it is the jagged cut of the garments, punched and shredded by the man-milliner; now, the wide and high collars and the long-pointed boots, which attract the indignation of the moralist; at one time he inveighs against the “horrible disordinate scantness” of the clothing worn by gallants, at another against the “outrageous array” in which ladies love to exhibit their charms. The knights' horses are decked out with not less finery than are the knights themselves, with “curious harness, as in saddles and bridles, cruppers and breastplates, covered with precious clothing, and with bars and plates of gold and silver.” And though it is hazardous to stigmatize the fashions of any one period as specially grotesque, yet it is significant of this age to find the reigning court beauty appearing at a tournament robed as Queen of the Sun; while even a lady from a manufacturing district, the *Wife of Bath*, makes the most of her opportunities to be seen as well as to see. Her “kerchiefs” were “full fine” of texture, and weighed, one might be sworn, ten pound—

“That on a Sunday were upon her head,
Her hosen too were of fine scarlet red,
Full straight y-tied, and shoes full moist and new.

* * * * *

Upon an ambler easily she sat,
Y-wimpled well, and on her head a hat,
As broad as is a buckler or a targe."

So, with a foot-mantle round her hips, and a pair of sharp spurs on her feet, she looked as defiant as any self-conscious Amazon of any period. It might, perhaps, be shown how, in more important artistic efforts than fashions of dress, this age displayed its aversion from simplicity and moderation. At all events, the love of the florid and overloaded declares itself in what we know concerning the social life of the nobility, as, for instance, we find that life reflected in the pages of Froissart, whose counts and lords seem neither to clothe themselves nor to feed themselves, nor to talk, pray, or swear like ordinary mortals. The *Vows of the Heron*, a poem of the earlier part of King Edward III.'s reign, contains a choice collection of strenuous knightly oaths; and in a humbler way the rest of the population very naturally imitated the parlance of their rulers, and in the words of the *Parson's Tale*, "dismembered Christ by soul, heart, bones, and body."

But there is one very much more important feature to be noticed in the social life of the nobility, for whom Chaucer's poetry must have largely replaced the French verse in which they had formerly delighted. The relation between knight and lady plays a great part in the history as well as in the literature of the later Plantagenet period; and incontestably its conceptions of this relation still retained much of the pure sentiment belonging to the best and most fervent times of Christian chivalry. The highest religious expression which has ever been given to man's sense of woman's mission, as his life's comfort and crown, was still a universally dominant belief. To the Blessed Virgin, King Edward III. dedicated his principal

religious foundation; and Chaucer, to whatever extent his opinions or sentiments may have been in accordance with ideas of ecclesiastical reform, displays a pious devotion towards the foremost Saint of the Church. The lyric entitled the *Praise of Women*, in which she is enthusiastically recognized as the representative of the whole of her sex, is generally rejected as not Chaucer's; but the elaborate "Orison to the Holy Virgin," beginning

"Mother of God, and Virgin undefiled,"

seems to be correctly described as *Oratio Gallfridi Chaucer*; and in *Chaucer's A. B. C.*, called *La Prière de Notre Dame*, a translation by him from a French original, we have a long address to the Blessed Virgin in twenty-three stanzas, each of which begins with one of the letters of the alphabet arranged in proper succession. Nor, apart from this religious sentiment, had men yet altogether lost sight of the ideal of true knightly love, destined though this ideal was to be obscured in the course of time, until at last the *Mort d'Arthur* was the favourite literary nourishment of the minions and mistresses of Edward IV.'s degenerate days. In his *Book of the Duchess* Chaucer has left us a picture of true knightly love, together with one of true maiden purity. The lady celebrated in this poem was both, merely for the sake of coquetting with their exploits, to send her knights upon errands of chivalry—

". . . Into Walachy,
To Prussia, and to Tartary,
To Alexandria or Turkéy."

And doubtless there was many a gentle knight or squire to whom might have been applied the description given by the heroine of Chaucer's *Troilus and Cressid* of her lover, and of that which attracted her in him:—

"For trust ye well that your estate royál,
 Nor vain delight, nor only worthiness
 Of you in war or tourney martial,
 Nor pomp, array, nobility, richés,
 Of these none made me rue on your distress;
But moral virtue, groundéd upon truth,
That was the cause I first had on you ruth.

"And gentle heart, and manhood that ye had,
 And that ye had (as méthought) in despite
 Everything that tended unto bad,
 As rudeness, and as popular appetite,
 And that your reason bridled your delight;
 'Twas these did make 'bove every créature
 That I was yours, and shall while I may 'dure."

And if true affection under the law still secured the sympathy of the better-balanced part of society, so the vice of those who made war upon female virtue, or the insolence of those who falsely boasted of their conquests, still incurred its resentment. Among the companies which in the *House o Fame* sought the favour of its mistress, Chaucer vigorously satirises the would-be lady-killers, who were content with the *reputation* of accomplished seducers; and in *Troilus and Cressid* a shrewd observer exclaims with the utmost vivacity against

"Such sort of folk—what shall I clepe them? what?
 That vaunt themselves of women, and by name,
 That yet to them ne'er promised this or that,
 Nor knew them more, in sooth, than mine old hat."

The same easy but sagacious philosopher (Pandarus) observes that the harm which is in this world springs as often from folly as from malice. But a deeper feeling animates the lament of the "good Alceste," in the Prologue

to the *Legend of Good Women*, that among men the betrayal of women is now "held a game." So indisputably it was already often esteemed, in too close an accordance with examples set in the highest places in the land. If we are to credit an old tradition, a poem in which Chaucer narrates the amours of Mars and Venus was written by him at the request of John of Gaunt, to celebrate the adultery of the duke's sister-in-law with a nobleman, to whom the injured kinsman afterwards married one of his own daughters! But nowhere was the deterioration of sentiment on this head more strongly typified than in Edward III. himself. The King, who (if the pleasing tale be true which gave rise to some beautiful scenes in an old English drama) had in his early days royally renounced an unlawful passion for the fair Countess of Salisbury, came to be accused of at once violating his conjugal duty and neglecting his military glory for the sake of strange women's charms. The founder of the Order of the Garter—the device of which enjoined purity even of thought as a principle of conduct—died in the hands of a rapacious courtesan. Thus, in England, as in France, the ascendancy is gained by ignobler views concerning the relation between the sexes—a relation to which the whole system of chivalry owed a great part of its vitality, and on the view of which prevailing in the most influential class of any nation, the social health of that nation must inevitably in no small measure depend. Meanwhile, the artificialities by means of which in France, up to the beginning of the fifteenth century, it was sought to keep alive an organised system of sentimentality in the social dealings between gentlemen and ladies, likewise found admission in England, but only in a modified degree. Here the fashion in question asserted itself only, or chiefly, in our poetic literature,

and in the adoption by it of such fancies as the praise and worship of the daisy, with which we meet in the Prologue to Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women*, and in the *Flower and the Leaf*, a most pleasing poem (suggested by a French model), which it is unfortunately no longer possible to number among his genuine works. The poem of the *Court of Love*, which was likewise long erroneously attributed to him, may be the original work of an English author; but in any case its main contents are a mere adaptation of a peculiar outgrowth on a foreign soil of conceptions common to chivalry in general.

Of another force, which in the Middle Ages shared with chivalry (though not with it alone) the empire over the minds of men, it would certainly be rash to assert that its day was passing away in the latter half of the fourteenth century. It has, indeed, been pointed out that the date at which Wyclif's career as a reformer may be said to have begun almost coincides with that of the climax and first decline of feudal chivalry in England. But, without seeking to interpret coincidences, we know that, though the influence of the Christian Church, and that of its Roman branch in particular, has asserted and re-asserted itself in various ways and degrees in various ages, yet in England, as elsewhere, the epoch of its moral omnipotence had come to an end many generations before the disruption of its external framework. In the fourteenth century men had long ceased to look for the mediation of the Church between an overbearing Crown and a baronage and commonalty eager for the maintenance of their rights or for the assertion of their claims. On the other hand, the conflicts which still recurred between the temporal power and the Church had as little reference as ever to spiritual concerns. Undoubtedly, the authority of the Church over the minds

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of the people still depended in the main upon the spiritual influence she exercised over them; and the desire for a reformation of the Church, which was already making itself felt in a gradually widening sphere, was, by the great majority of those who cherished it, held perfectly compatible with a recognition of her authority. The world, it has been well said, needed an enquiry extending over three centuries, in order to learn to walk without the aid of the Church of Rome. Wyclif, who sought to emancipate the human conscience from reliance upon any earthly authority intermediate between the soul and its Maker, reckoned without his generation; and few, except those with whom audacity took the place of argument, followed him to the extreme results of his speculations. The Great Schism rather stayed than promoted the growth of an English feeling against Rome, since it was now no longer necessary to acknowledge a Pope who seemed the henchman of the arch-foe across the narrow seas.

But although the progress of English sentiment towards the desire for liberation from Rome was to be interrupted by a long and seemingly decisive reaction, yet in the fourteenth, as in the sixteenth, century the most active cause of the alienation of the people from the Church was the conduct of the representatives of the Church themselves. The Reformation has most appropriately retained in history a name at first unsuspectingly applied to the removal of abuses in the ecclesiastical administration and in the life of the clergy. What aid could be derived by those who really hungered for spiritual food, or what strength could accrue to the thoughtless faith of the light-hearted majority, from many of the most common varieties of the English ecclesiastic of the later Middle Ages? Apart from the Italian and other foreign holders of English benefices,

who left their flocks to be tended by deputy, and to be shorn by an army of the most offensive kind of tax-gatherers, the native clergy included many species, but among them few which, to the popular eye, seemed to embody a high ideal of religious life. The times had by no means come to an end when many of the higher clergy sought to vie with the lay lords in warlike prowess. Perhaps the martial Bishop of Norwich, who, after persecuting the heretics at home, had commanded an army of crusaders in Flanders, levied on behalf of Pope Urban VI. against the anti-Pope Clement VII. and his adherents, was in the poet Gower's mind when he complains that while

“ . . . The law is rulèd so,
That clerks unto the war intend,
I wot not how they should amend
The woeful world in other things,
And so make peace between the kings
After the law of charity,
Which is the duty properly
Belonging unto the priesthóod.”

A more general complaint, however, was that directing itself against the extravagance and luxury of life in which the dignified clergy indulged. The cost of these unspiritual pleasures the great prelates had ample means for defraying in the revenues of their sees; while lesser dignitaries had to be active in levying their dues or the fines of their courts, lest everything should flow into the receptacles of their superiors. So in Chaucer's *Friar's Tale* an unfriendly Regular says of an archdeacon:—

“For smallë tithes and for small offering
He made the people piteously to sing.
For ere the bishop caught them on his hook,
They were down in the archdeacon's book.”

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As a matter of course, the worthy who filled the office of *Summoner* to the court of the archdeacon in question had a keen eye for the profitable improprieties subject to its penalties, and was aided in his efforts by the professional abettors of vice whom he kept "ready to his hand." Nor is it strange that the undisguised worldliness of many members of the clerical profession should have reproduced itself in other lay subordinates, even in the parish clerks, at all times apt to copy their betters, though we would fain hope such was not the case with the parish clerk, "the jolly Absalom" of the *Miller's Tale*. The love of gold had corrupted the acknowledged chief guardians of incorruptible treasures, even though few may have avowed this love as openly as the "idle" *Canon*, whose *Yeoman* had so strange a tale to tell to the Canterbury pilgrims concerning his master's absorbing devotion to the problem of the multiplication of gold. To what a point the popular discontent with the vices of the higher secular clergy had advanced in the last decennium of the century, may be seen from the poem called the *Complaint of the Ploughman*—a production pretending to be by the same hand which in the *Vision* had dwelt on the sufferings of the people and on the sinfulness of the ruling classes. Justly or unjustly, the indictment was brought against the priests of being the agents of every evil influence among the people, the soldiers of an army of which the true head was not God, but Belial.

In earlier days the Church had known how to compensate the people for the secular clergy's neglect, or imperfect performance, of its duties. But in no respect had the ecclesiastical world more changed than in this. The older monastic Orders had long since lost themselves in unconcealed worldliness; how, for instance, had the Benc-

dictines changed their character since the remote times when their Order had been the principal agent in revivifying the religion of the land! Now, they were taunted with their very name, as having been bestowed upon them "by antiphrasis," *i. e.*, by contraries. From many of their monasteries, and from the inmates who dwelt in these comfortable halls, had vanished even all pretence of disguise. Chaucer's *Monk* paid no attention to the rule of St. Benedict, and of his disciple St. Maur,

"Because that it was old and somewhat strait;"

and preferred to fall in with the notions of later times. He was an "outrider, that loved venery," and whom his tastes and capabilities would have well qualified for the dignified post of abbot. He had "full many a dainty horse" in his stable, and the swiftest of greyhounds to boot; and rode forth gaily, clad in superfine furs and a hood elegantly fastened with a gold pin, and tied into a love-knot at the "greater end," while the bridle of his steed jingled as if its rider had been as good a knight as any of them—this last, by the way, a mark of ostentation against which Wyclif takes occasion specially to inveigh. This Monk (and Chaucer must say that he was wise in his generation) could not understand why he should study books and unhinge his mind by the effort; life was not worth having at the price; and no one knew better to what use to put the pleasing gift of existence. Hence mine host of the Tabard, a very competent critic, had reason for the opinion which he communicated to the Monk:—

"It is a noble pasture where thou go'st;
Thou art not like a penitent or ghost."

In the Orders of nuns, certain corresponding features were

becoming usual. But little in the way of religious guidance could fall to the lot of a sisterhood presided over by such a *Prioress* as Chaucer's Madame Eglantine, whose mind—possibly because her nunnery fulfilled the functions of a finishing school for young ladies—was mainly devoted to French and deportment, or by such a one as the historical Lady Juliana Berners, of a rather later date, whose leisure hours produced treatises on hunting and hawking, and who would probably have, on behalf of her own sex, echoed the *Monk's* contempt for the prejudice against the participation of the Religious in field-sports:—

“He gave not for that text a pulled hen
That saith, that hunters be no holy men.”

On the other hand, neither did the Mendicant Orders, instituted at a later date purposely to supply what the older Orders, as well as the secular clergy, seemed to have grown incapable of furnishing, any longer satisfy the reason of their being. In the fourteenth century the Dominicans, or Black Friars, who at London dwelt in such magnificence that king and Parliament often preferred a sojourn with them to abiding at Westminster, had in general grown accustomed to concentrate their activity upon the spiritual direction of the higher classes. But though they counted among them Englishmen of eminence (one of these was Chaucer's friend, “the philosophical Strode”), they, in truth, never played a more than secondary part in this country, to whose soil the delicate machinery of the Inquisition, of which they were by choice the managers, was never congenial. Of far greater importance for the population of England at large was the Order of the Franciscans, or (as they were here wont to call themselves or to be called) Minorites or Grey Friars. To them the poor

had habitually looked for domestic ministrations, and for the inspiring and consoling eloquence of the pulpit; and they had carried their labours into the midst of the suffering population, not afraid of association with that poverty which they were by their vow themselves bound to espouse, or of contact with the horrors of leprosy and the plague. Departing from the short-sighted policy of their illustrious founder, they had become a learned as well as a ministering and preaching Order; and it was precisely from among them that, at Oxford and elsewhere, sprang a succession of learned monks, whose names are inseparably connected with some of the earliest English growths of philosophical speculation and scientific research. Nor is it possible to doubt that in the middle of the thirteenth century the monks of this Order at Oxford had exercised an appreciable influence upon the beginnings of a political struggle of unequalled importance for the progress of our constitutional life. But in the Franciscans also the fourteenth century witnessed a change, which may be described as a gradual loss of the qualities for which they had been honourably distinguished; and in England, as elsewhere, the spirit of the words which Dante puts into the mouth of St. Francis of Assisi was being verified by his degenerate children:—

"So soft is flesh of mortals, that on earth
A good beginning doth no longer last
Than while an oak may bring its fruit to birth."

Outwardly, indeed, the Grey Friars might still often seem what their predecessors had been, and might thus retain a powerful influence over the unthinking crowd, and to sheer worldlings appear, as heretofore, to represent a troublesome *memento* of unexciting religious obligations; "Preach not," says Chaucer's *Host*,

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"... As friars do in Lent,
That they for our old sins may make us weep,
Nor in such wise thy tale make us to sleep."

But in general men were beginning to suspect the motives as well as to deride the practices of the Friars, to accuse them of lying against St. Francis, and to desiderate for them an actual abode of fire, resembling that of which, in their favourite religious shows, they were wont to present the mimic semblance to the multitude. It was they who became in England, as elsewhere, the purveyors of charms and the organisers of pious frauds, while the learning for which their Order had been famous was withering away into the yellow leaf of scholasticism. The Friar in general became the common butt of literary satire; and though the populace still remained true to its favourite guides, a reaction was taking place in favour of the secular as against the regular clergy in the sympathies of the higher classes, and in the spheres of society most open to intellectual influences. The monks and the London multitude were at one time united against John of Gaunt, but it was from the ranks of the secular clergy that Wyclif came forth to challenge the ascendancy of Franciscan scholasticism in his university. Meanwhile the poet who in the *Poor Parson of the Town* paints his ideal of a Christian minister—simple, poor, and devoted to his holy work—has nothing but contempt for the friars at large, and for the whole machinery worked by them, half effete, and half spasmodic, and altogether sham. In King Arthur's time, says that accurate and unprejudiced observer, the *Wife of Bath*, the land was filled with fairies—now it is filled with friars as thick as motes in the beam of the sun. Among them there is the *Pardoner*—i. e., seller of pardons (indulgences)—with his "haughty" sermons, delivered "by rote" to

congregation after congregation in the self-same words, and everywhere accompanied by the self-same tricks of anecdotes and jokes—with his Papal credentials, and with the pardons he has brought from Rome “all hot”—and with precious relics to rejoice the hearts of the faithful, and to fill his own pockets with the proceeds: to wit, a pillowcase covered with the veil of Our Lady, and a piece of the sail of the ship in which St. Peter went out fishing on the Lake of Gennesareth. This worthy, who lays bare his own motives with unparalleled cynical brutality, is manifestly drawn from the life; or the portrait could not have been accepted which was presented alike by Chaucer, and by his contemporary Langland, and (a century and a half later) in the plagiarism of the orthodox Catholic John Heywood. There, again, is the *Limitour*, a friar licensed to beg, and to hear confession and grant absolution, within the *limits* of a certain district. He is described by Chaucer with so much humour that one can hardly suspect much exaggeration in the sketch. In him we have the truly popular ecclesiastic who springs from the people, lives among the people, and feels with the people. He is the true friend of the poor, and being such, has, as one might say, his finger in every pie; for “a fly and a friar will fall in every dish and every business.” His readily-proffered arbitration settles the differences of the humbler classes at the “love-days,” a favourite popular practice noted already in the *Vision* of Langland; nor is he a niggard of the mercies which he is privileged to dispense:—

“Full sweetly did he hear confessioun,
And pleasant was his absolucioun.
He was an easy man to give penance,
Whereso wist to have a good pittance;

For unto a poor Order for to give,
 Is signè that a man is well y-shrive;
 For if he gave, he durstè make a vaunt
 He wistè that a man was répentant.
 For many a man so hard is of his heart
 He can not weep although he sorely smart.
 Therefore, instead of weeping and of prayers,
 Men must give silver to the poorè Freres."

Already in the French *Roman de la Rose* the rivalry between the Friars and the Parish Priests is the theme of much satire, evidently unfavourable to the former and favourable to the latter; but in England, where Langland likewise dwells upon the jealousy between them, it was specially accentuated by the assaults of Wyclif upon the Mendicant Orders. Wyclif's Simple Priests, who at first ministered with the approval of the Bishops, differed from the Mendicants—first, by not being beggars; and, secondly, by being poor. They might, perhaps, have themselves ultimately played the part of a new Order in England, had not Wyclif himself, by rejecting the cardinal dogma of the Church, severed these followers of his from its organism and brought about their suppression. The question as to Chaucer's own attitude towards the Wycliffite movement will be more conveniently touched upon below; but the tone is unmistakable of the references or allusions to Lollardry which he occasionally introduces into the mouth of his *Host*, whose voice is that *vox populi* which the upper and middle classes so often arrogate to themselves. Whatever those classes might desire, it was not to have "cockle sown" by unauthorised intruders "in the corn" of their ordinary instruction. Thus there is a tone of genuine attachment to the "vested interest" principle, and of aversion from all such interlopers as lay preachers

and the like, in the *Host's* exclamation, uttered after the *Reeve* has been (in his own style) "sermoning" on the topic of old age:—

"What availleth all this wit?
What? should we speak all day of Holy Writ?
The devil surely made a reeve to preach;"

for which he is as well suited as a cobbler would be for turning mariner or physician!

Thus, then, in the England of Chaucer's days we find the Church still in possession of vast temporal wealth and of great power and privileges—as well as of means for enforcing unity of profession which the legislation of the Lancastrian dynasty, stimulated by the prevailing fears of heresy, was still further to increase. On the other hand, we find the influence of the clergy over the minds of the people diminished, though not extinguished. This was, in the case of the higher secular clergy, partly attributable to their self-indulgence or neglect of their functions, partly to their having been largely superseded by the Regulars in the control of the religious life of the people. The Orders we find no longer at the height of their influence, but still powerful by their wealth, their numbers, their traditional hold upon the lower classes, and their determination to retain this hold even by habitually resorting to the most dubious of methods. Lastly, we find in the lower secular clergy, and doubtless may also assume it to have lingered among some of the regular, some of the salt left whose savour consists in a single-minded and humble resolution to maintain the highest standard of a religious life. But such "clerks" as these are at no times the most easily found, because it is not they who are always running "unto London, unto St. Paul's," on urgent private affairs.

What wonder that the real teaching of Wyclif, of which the full significance could hardly be understood but by a select few, should have virtually fallen dead upon his generation, to which the various agitations and agitators, often mingling ideas of religious reform with social and political grievances, seemed to be identical in character and alike to require suppression! In truth, of course, these movements and their agents were often very different from one another in their ends, and were not to be suppressed by the same processes.

It should not be forgotten that in this century learning was, though only very gradually, ceasing to be a possession of the clergy alone. Much doubt remains as to the extent of education—if a little reading and less writing deserve the name—among the higher classes in this period of our national life. A cheering sign appears in the circumstance that the legal deeds of this age begin to bear signatures, and a reference to John of Trevisa would bear out Hallam's conjecture, that in the year 1400 "the average instruction of an English gentleman of the first class would comprehend common reading and writing, a considerable knowledge of French, and a slight tincture of Latin." Certain it is that in this century the barren teaching of the Universities advanced but little towards the true end of all academical teaching—the encouragement and spread of the highest forms of national culture. To what use could a gentleman of Edward III.'s or Richard II.'s day have put the acquirements of a *Clerk of Oxenford* in Aristotelian logic, supplemented perhaps by a knowledge of Priscian, and the rhetorical works of Cicero? Chaucer's scholar, however much his learned modesty of manner and sententious brevity of speech may commend him to our sympathy and taste, is a man wholly out of the world in which

he lives, though a dependent on its charity even for the means with which to purchase more of his beloved books. Probably no trustworthier conclusions as to the literary learning and studies of those days are to be derived from any other source than from a comparison of the few catalogues of contemporary libraries remaining to us; and these help to show that the century was approaching its close before a few sparse rays of the first dawn of the Italian Renaissance reached England. But this ray was communicated neither through the clergy nor through the Universities; and such influence as was exercised by it upon the national mind was directly due to profane poets—men of the world, who, like Chaucer, quoted authorities even more abundantly than they used them, and made some of their happiest discoveries after the fashion in which the *Oxford Clerk* came across Petrarch's Latin version of the story of Patient Grissel: as it were by accident. There is only too ample a justification for leaving aside the records of the history of learning in England during the latter half of the fourteenth century in any sketch of the main influences which in that period determined or affected the national progress. It was not by his theological learning that Wyclif was brought into living contact with the current of popular thought and feeling. The Universities were thriving exceedingly on the scholastic glories of previous ages; but the ascendancy was passing away to which Oxford had attained over Paris—during the earlier middle ages, and again in the fifteenth century until the advent of the Renaissance, the central university of Europe in the favourite study of scholastic philosophy and theology.

But we must turn from particular classes and ranks of men to the whole body of the population, exclusively of

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that great section of it which unhappily lay outside the observation of any but a very few writers, whether poets or historians. In the people at large we may, indeed, easily discern in this period the signs of an advance towards that self-government which is the true foundation of our national greatness. But, on the other hand, it is impossible not to observe how, while the moral ideas of the people were still under the control of the Church, the State in its turn still ubiquitously interfered in the settlement of the conditions of social existence, fixing prices, controlling personal expenditure, regulating wages. Not until England had fully attained to the character of a commercial country, which it was coming gradually to assume, did its inhabitants begin to understand the value of that which has gradually come to distinguish ours among the nations of Europe, viz., the right of individual Englishmen, as well as of the English people, to manage their own affairs for themselves. This may help to explain what can hardly fail to strike a reader of Chaucer and of the few contemporary remains of our literature. About our national life in this period, both in its virtues and in its vices, there is something—it matters little whether we call it—childlike or childish; in its “apert” if not in its “privy” sides it lacks the seriousness belonging to men and to generations, who have learnt to control themselves, instead of relying on the control of others.

In illustration of this assertion, appeal might be made to several of the most salient features in the social life of the period. The extravagant expenditure in dress, fostered by a love of pageantry of various kinds encouraged by both chivalry and the Church, has been already referred to; it was by no means distinctive of any one class of the population. Among the friars who went about preaching

homilies on the people's favourite vices some humorous rogues may, like the *Pardoner* of the *Canterbury Tales*, have made a point of treating their own favourite vice as their one and unchangeable text:—

"My theme is always one, and ever was:
Radix malorum est cupiditas."

But others preferred to dwell on specifically lay sins; and these moralists occasionally attributed to the love of expenditure on dress the impoverishment of the kingdom, forgetting, in their ignorance of political economy and defiance of common sense, that this result was really due to the endless foreign wars. Yet, in contrast with the pomp and ceremony of life, upon which so great an amount of money and time and thought was wasted, are noticeable shortcomings by no means uncommon in the case of undeveloped civilisations (as, for instance, among the most typically childish or childlike nationalities of the Europe of our own day), viz., discomfort and uncleanness of all sorts. To this may be added the excessive fondness for sports and pastimes of all kinds, in which nations are aptest to indulge before or after the era of their highest efforts—the desire to make life one long holiday, dividing it between tournaments and the dalliance of courts of love, or between archery-meetings (skilfully substituted by royal command for less useful exercises), and the seductive company of "tumblers," "fruiterers," and "waferers." Furthermore, one may notice in all classes a far from eradicated inclination to superstitions of every kind—whether those encouraged or those discouraged¹ by the Church—

¹ "For holy Church's faith, in our belief,
Suffereth no illusion us to grieve."

The Franklin's Tale.

an inclination unfortunately fostered rather than checked by the uncertain gropings of contemporary science. Hence, the credulous acceptance of relics like those sold by the *Pardoner*, and of legends like those related to Chaucer's *Pilgrims* by the *Prioress* (one of the numerous repetitions of a cruel calumny against the Jews), and by the *Second Nun* (the supra-sensual story of Saint Cecilia). Hence, on the other hand, the greedy hunger for the marvels of astrology and alchemy, notwithstanding the growing scepticism even of members of a class represented by Chaucer's *Franklin* towards

" . . . Such folly
As in our days is not held worth a fly,"

and notwithstanding the exposure of fraud by repentant or sickened accomplices, such as the gold-making *Canon's Yeoman*. Hence, again, the vitality of such quasi-scientific fancies as the magic mirror, of which miraculous instrument the *Squire's* "half-told story" describes a specimen, referring to the incontestable authority of Aristotle and others, who write "in their lives" concerning quaint mirrors and perspective glasses, as is well known to those who have "heard the books" of these sages. Hence, finally, the corresponding tendency to eschew the consideration of serious religious questions, and to leave them to clerks, as if they were crabbed problems of theology. For, in truth, while the most fertile and fertilising ideas of the Middle Ages had exhausted, or were rapidly coming to exhaust, their influence upon the people, the forms of the doctrines of the Church—even of the most stimulative as well as of the most solemn among them—had grown hard and stiff. To those who received, if not to those who taught, these doctrines they seemed alike lifeless, unless

translated into the terms of the merest earthly transactions or the language of purely human relations. And thus, paradoxical as it might seem, cool-headed and conscientious rulers of the Church thought themselves on occasion called upon to restrain rather than to stimulate the religious ardour of the multitude—fed as the flame was by very various materials. Perhaps no more characteristic narrative has come down to us from the age of the poet of the *Canterbury Tales* than the story of Bishop (afterwards Archbishop) Sudbury and the Canterbury Pilgrims. In the year 1370 the land was agitated through its length and breadth, on the occasion of the fourth jubilee of the national saint, Thomas the Martyr. The pilgrims were streaming in numbers along the familiar Kentish road, when, on the very vigil of the feast, one of their companies was accidentally met by the Bishop of London. They demanded his blessing; but, to their astonishment and indignation, he seized the occasion to read a lesson to the crowd on the uselessness to unrepentant sinners of the plenary indulgences, for the sake of which they were wending their way to the Martyr's shrine. The rage of the multitude found a mouthpiece in a soldier, who loudly upbraided the Bishop for stirring up the people against St. Thomas, and warned him that a shameful death would befall him in consequence. The multitude shouted *Amen*—and one is left to wonder whether any of the pious pilgrims who resented Bishop Sudbury's manly truthfulness swelled the mob which eleven years later butchered "the plunderer," as it called him, "of the Commons." It is such glimpses as this which show us how important the Church had become towards the people. Worse was to ensue before the better came; in the mean time, the nation was in that stage of its existence when the innocence of

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the child was fast losing itself, without the self-control of the man having yet taken its place.

But the heart of England was sound the while. The national spirit of enterprise was not dead in any class, from knight to shipman; and faithfulness and chastity in woman were still esteemed the highest though not the universal virtues of her sex. The value of such evidence as the mind of a great poet speaking in his works furnishes for a knowledge of the times to which he belongs is inestimable; for it shows us what has survived, as well as what was doomed to decay, in the life of the nation with which that mind was in sensitive sympathy. And it therefore seemed not inappropriate to approach, in the first instance, from this point of view, the subject of this biographical essay—Chaucer, “the poet of the dawn:” for in him there are many things significant of the age of transition in which he lived; in him the mixture of Frenchman and Englishman is still in a sense incomplete, as that of their language is in the diction of his poems. His gaiety of heart is hardly English; nor is his willing (though, to be sure, not invariably unquestioning) acceptance of forms into the inner meaning of which he does not greatly vex his soul by entering; nor his airy way of ridiculing what he has no intention of helping to overthrow; nor his light unconcern in the question whether he is, or is not, an immoral writer. Or, at least, in all of these things he has no share in qualities and tendencies, which influences and conflicts unknown to and unforeseen by him may be safely said to have ultimately made characteristic of Englishmen. But he *is* English in his freedom and frankness of spirit; in his manliness of mind; in his preference for the good in things as they are to the good in things as they might be; in his loyalty, his piety,

his truthfulness. Of the great movement which was to mould the national character for at least a long series of generations he displays no serious foreknowledge; and of the elements already preparing to affect the course of that movement he shows a very incomplete consciousness. But of the health and strength which, after struggles many and various, made that movement possible and made it victorious, he, more than any one of his contemporaries, is the living type and the speaking witness. Thus, like the times to which he belongs, he stands half in and half out of the Middle Ages, half in and half out of a phase of our national life, which we can never hope to understand more than partially and imperfectly. And it is this, taken together with the fact that he is the first English poet to read whom is to enjoy him, and that he garnished not only our language but our literature with blossoms still adorning them in vernal freshness—which makes Chaucer's figure so unique a one in the gallery of our great English writers, and gives to his works an interest so inexhaustible for the historical as well as for the literary student.

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CHAPTER II.

CHAUCER'S LIFE AND WORKS.

SOMETHING has been already said as to the conflict of opinion concerning the period of Geoffrey Chaucer's birth, the precise date of which is very unlikely ever to be ascertained. A better fortune has attended the anxious enquiries which in his case, as in those of other great men, have been directed to the very secondary question of ancestry and descent—a question to which, in the abstract at all events, no man ever attached less importance than he. Although the name *Chaucer* is (according to Thynne) to be found on the lists of Battle Abbey, this no more proves that the poet himself came of “high parage,” than the reverse is to be concluded from the nature of his coat-of-arms, which Speght thought must have been taken out of the 27th and 28th Propositions of the First Book of Euclid. Many a warrior of the Norman Conquest was known to his comrades only by the name of the trade which he had plied in some French or Flemish town, before he attached himself a volunteer to Duke William's holy and lucrative expedition; and it is doubtful whether, even in the fourteenth century, the name *Le Chaucer* is, wherever it occurs in London, used as a surname, or whether, in some instances, it is not merely a designation of the owner's trade. Thus we should not be justified in

assuming a French origin for the family from which Richard le Chaucer, whom we know to have been the poet's grandfather, was descended. Whether or not he was at any time a shoemaker (*chaucier*, maker of *chausses*), and accordingly belonged to a gentle craft otherwise not unassociated with the history of poetry, Richard was a citizen of London, and vintner, like his son John after him. John Chaucer, whose wife's Christian name may be with tolerable safety set down as Agnes, owned a house in Thames Street, London, not far from the arch on which modern pilgrims pass by rail to Canterbury or beyond, and in the neighbourhood of the great bridge, which in Chaucer's own day emptied its travellers on their errands, sacred or profane, into the great Southern road, the *Via Appia* of England. The house afterwards descended to John's son, GEOFFREY, who released his right to it by deed in the year 1380. Chaucer's father was probably a man of some substance, the most usual personal recommendation to great people in one of his class. For he was at least temporarily connected with the Court, inasmuch as he attended King Edward III. and Queen Philippa on the memorable journey to Flanders and Germany, in the course of which the English monarch was proclaimed Vicar of the Holy Roman Empire on the left bank of the Rhine. John Chaucer died in 1366, and in course of time his widow married another citizen and vintner. Thomas Heyroun, John Chaucer's brother of the half-blood, was likewise a member of the same trade; so that the young Geoffrey was certainly not brought up in an atmosphere of abstinence. The *Host* of the *Canterbury Tales*, though he takes his name from an actual personage, may therefore have in him touches of a family portrait; but Chaucer himself nowhere displays any traces of a hereditary devo-

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tion to Bacchus, and makes so experienced a practitioner as the *Pardoner* the mouthpiece of as witty an invective against drunkenness as has been uttered by any assailant of our existing licensing laws. Chaucer's own practice, as well as his opinion on this head, is sufficiently expressed in the characteristic words he puts into the mouth of Cressid:—

“In everything, I wot, there lies mesure:
For though a man forbid all drunkenness,
He biddeth not that every créature
Be drinkless altogether, as I guess.”

Of Geoffrey Chaucer we know nothing whatever from the day of his birth (whenever it befell) to the year 1357. His earlier biographers, who supposed him to have been born in 1328, had accordingly a fair field open for conjecture and speculation. Here it must suffice to risk the asseveration that he cannot have accompanied his father to Cologne in 1338, and on that occasion have been first “taken notice of” by king and queen, if he was not born till two or more years afterwards. If, on the other hand, he was born in 1328, both events *may* have taken place. On neither supposition is there any reason for believing that he studied at one—or at both—of our English Universities. The poem cannot be accepted as Chaucerian, the author of which (very possibly by a mere dramatic assumption) declares:—

“Philogenet I call’d am far and near,
Of Cambridge clerk;”

nor can any weight be attached to the circumstance that the *Clerk*, who is one of the most delightful figures among the Canterbury Pilgrims, is an Oxonian. The enticing enquiry as to *which* of the sister Universities may claim

Chaucer as her own must, therefore, be allowed to drop, together with the subsidiary question, whether stronger evidence of local colouring is furnished by the *Miller's* picture of the life of a poor scholar in lodgings at Oxford, or by the *Reeve's* rival narrative of the results of a Trumpington walk taken by two undergraduates of the "Solar Hall" at Cambridge. Equally baseless is the supposition of one of Chaucer's earliest biographers, that he completed his academical studies at Paris—and equally futile the concomitant fiction that in France "he acquired much applause by his literary exercises." Finally, we have the tradition that he was a member of the Inner Temple—which is a conclusion deduced from a piece of genial scandal as to a record having been seen in that inn of a fine imposed upon him for beating a friar in Fleet Street. This story was early placed by Thynne on the horns of a sufficiently decisive dilemma: in the days of Chaucer's youth, lawyers had not yet been admitted into the Temple; and in the days of his maturity he is not very likely to have been found engaged in battery in a London thoroughfare.

We now desert the region of groundless conjecture, in order, with the year 1357, to arrive at a firm though not very broad footing of facts. In this year "Geoffrey Chaucer" (whom it would be too great an effort of scepticism to suppose to have been merely a namesake of the poet) is mentioned in the Household Book of Elizabeth, Countess of Ulster, wife of Prince Lionel (third son of King Edward III., and afterwards Duke of Clarence), as a recipient of certain articles of apparel. Two similar notices of his name occur up to the year 1359. He is hence concluded to have belonged to Prince Lionel's establishment as squire or page to the Lady Elizabeth; and it was probably in the Prince's retinue that he took part in the

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expedition of King Edward III. into France, which began at the close of the year 1359 with the ineffectual siege of Rheims, and in the next year, after a futile attempt upon Paris, ended with the compromise of the Peace of Brétigny. In the course of this campaign Chaucer was taken prisoner; but he was released without much loss of time, as appears by a document bearing date March 1st, 1360, in which the King contributes the sum of 16*l.* for Chaucer's ransom. We may, therefore, conclude that he missed the march upon Paris, and the sufferings undergone by the English army on their road thence to Chartres—the most exciting experiences of an inglorious campaign; and that he was actually set free by the Peace. When, in the year 1367, we next meet with his name in authentic records, his earliest known patron, the Lady Elizabeth, is dead; and he has passed out of the service of Prince Lionel into that of King Edward himself, as Valet of whose Chamber or household he receives a yearly salary for life of twenty marks, for his former and future services. Very possibly he had quitted Prince Lionel's service when, in 1361, that Prince had, by reason of his marriage with the heiress of Ulster, been appointed to the Irish government by his father, who was supposed at one time to have destined him for the Scottish throne.

Concerning the doings of Chaucer in the interval between his liberation from his French captivity and the first notice of him as Valet of the King's Chamber we know nothing at all. During these years, however, no less important a personal event than his marriage was by earlier biographers supposed to have occurred. On the other hand, according to the view which commends itself to several eminent living commentators of the poet, it was not courtship and marriage, but a hopeless and unrequited pas-

sion, which absorbed these years of his life. Certain stanzas in which, as they think, he gave utterance to this passion are by them ascribed to one of these years; so that, if their view were correct, the poem in question would have to be regarded as the earliest of his extant productions. The problem which we have indicated must detain us for a moment.

It is attested by documentary evidence that in the year 1374 Chaucer had a wife by name Philippa, who had been in the service of John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster, and of his Duchess (doubtless his second wife, Constance), as well as in that of his mother, the good Queen Philippa, and who on several occasions afterwards, besides special new-year's gifts of silver-gilt cups from the Duke, received her annual pension of ten marks through her husband. It is likewise proved that, in 1366, a pension of ten marks was granted to a Philippa Chaucer, one of the ladies of the Queen's Chamber. Obviously, it is a highly probable assumption that these two Philippa Chaucers were one and the same person; but in the absence of any direct proof it is impossible to affirm as certain, or to deny as demonstrably untrue, that the Philippa Chaucer of 1366 owed her surname to marriage. Yet the view was long held, and is still maintained by writers of knowledge and insight, that the Philippa of 1366 was at that date Chaucer's wife. In or before that year he married, it was said, Philippa Roet, daughter of Sir Paon de Roet of Hainault, Guienne King of Arms, who came to England in Queen Philippa's retinue in 1328. This tradition derived special significance from the fact that another daughter of Sir Paon, Katharine, widow of Sir Hugh Swynford, was successively governess, mistress, and (third) wife to the Duke of Lancaster, to whose service both Geoffrey and Philippa

Chaucer found support in his own view that the poet's perstringent then must have been a year more tentative, or besides Chaucer to have in these

There married man a pension this negotiation enough the Duke the year both very interpreted they could has lasted seems to from an years," he in vain—but one person and done cannot be possible to i

Chaucer were at one time attached. It was apparently founded on the circumstance that Thomas Chaucer, the supposed son of the poet, quartered the Roet arms with his own. But unfortunately there is no evidence to show that Thomas Chaucer was a son of Geoffrey; and the superstructure must needs vanish with its basis. It being then no longer indispensable to assume Chaucer to have been a married man in 1366, the Philippa Chaucer of that year *may* have been only a namesake, and possibly a relative, of Geoffrey; for there were other Chaucers in London besides him and his father (who died this year), and one Chaucer at least has been found who was well-to-do enough to have a Damsel of the Queen's Chamber for his daughter in these certainly not very exclusive times.

There is, accordingly, no *proof* that Chaucer was a married man before 1374, when he is known to have received a pension for his own and his wife's services. But with this negative result we are asked not to be poor-spirited enough to rest content. At the opening of his *Book of the Duchess*, a poem certainly written towards the end of the year 1369, Chaucer makes use of certain expressions, both very pathetic and very definite. The most obvious interpretation of the lines in question seems to be that they contain the confession of a hopeless passion, which has lasted for eight years—a confession which certainly seems to come more appropriately and more naturally from an unmarried than from a married man. "For eight years," he says, or seems to say, "I have loved, and loved in vain—and yet my cure is never the nearer. There is but one physician that can heal me—but all that is ended and done with. Let us pass on into fresh fields; what cannot be obtained must needs be left." It seems impossible to interpret this passage (too long to cite *in extenso*)

as a complaint of married life. Many other poets have, indeed, complained of their married lives, and Chaucer (if the view to be advanced below be correct) as emphatically as any. But though such occasional exclamations of impatience or regret—more especially when in a comic vein—may receive pardon, or even provoke amusement, yet a serious and sustained poetic version of Sterne's "*sum multum fatigatus de uxore mea*" would be unbearable in any writer of self-respect, and wholly out of character in Chaucer. Even Byron only indited elegies about his married life after his wife *had left him*.

Now, among Chaucer's minor poems is preserved one called the *Complaint of the Death of Pity*, which purports to set forth "how pity is dead and buried in a gentle heart," and, after testifying to a hopeless passion, ends with the following declaration, addressed to Pity, as in a "bill" or letter:—

"This is to say: I will be yours for ever,
Though ye me slay by Cruelty, your foe;
Yet shall my spirit nevermore dissever
From your service, for any pain or woe,
Pity, whom I have sought so long ago!
Thus for your death I may well weep and plain,
With heart all sore, and full of busy pain."

If this poem be autobiographical, it would indisputably correspond well enough to a period in Chaucer's life, and to a mood of mind preceding those to which the introduction to the *Book of the Duchess* belongs. If it be not autobiographical—and in truth there is nothing to prove it such, so that an attempt has been actually made to suggest its having been intended to apply to the experiences of another man—then the *Complaint of Pity* has no special value for students of Chaucer, since its poetic beauty, as

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there can be no harm in observing, is not in itself very great.

To come to an end of this topic, there seems no possibility of escaping from one of the following alternatives: *Either* the Philippa Chaucer of 1366 was Geoffrey Chaucer's wife, whether or not she was Philippa Roet before marriage, and the lament of 1369 had reference to another lady—an assumption to be regretted in the case of a married man, but not out of the range of possibility. *Or*—and this seems, on the whole, the most probable view—the Philippa Chaucer of 1366 was a namesake whom Geoffrey married some time after 1369—possibly (of course only *possibly*) the very lady whom he had loved hopelessly for eight years, and persuaded himself that he had at last relinquished, and who had then relented after all. This last conjecture it is certainly difficult to reconcile with the conclusion at which we arrive on other grounds, that Chaucer's married life was not one of preponderating bliss. That he and his wife were *cousins* is a pleasing thought, but one which is not made more pleasing by the seeming fact that, if they were so related, marriage in their case failed to draw close that hearts' bond which such kinship at times half unconsciously knits.

Married or still a bachelor, Chaucer may fairly be supposed, during part of the years previous to that in which we find him securely established in the King's service, to have enjoyed a measure of independence and leisure open to few men in his rank of life, when once the golden days of youth and early manhood have passed away. Such years are in many men's lives marked by the projection, or even by the partial accomplishment, of literary undertakings on a large scale, and more especially of such as partake of an imitative character. When a juvenile and

facile writer's taste is still unsettled, and his own style is as yet unformed, he eagerly tries his hand at the reproduction of the work of others; translates the *Iliad* or *Faust*, or suits himself with unsuspecting promptitude to the production of masques, or pastorals, or life dramas—or whatever may be the prevailing fashion in poetry—after the manner of the favourite literary models of the day. *A priori*, therefore, everything is in favour of the belief hitherto universally entertained, that among Chaucer's earliest poetical productions was the extant English translation of the French *Roman de la Rose*. That he made *some* translation of this poem is a fact resting on his own statement in a passage indisputably written by him (in the *Prologue* to the *Legend of Good Women*); nor is the value of this statement reduced by the negative circumstance, that in the extraordinary tag (if it may be called by so irreverent a name) to the extant *Canterbury Tales*, the *Romaunt of the Rose* is passed over in silence, or at least not nominally mentioned, among the objectionable works which the poet is there made to retract. And there seems at least no necessity for giving in to the conclusion that Chaucer's translation has been lost, and was not that which has been hitherto accepted as his. For this conclusion is based upon the use of a formal test, which, in truth, need not be regarded as of itself absolutely decisive in any case, but which in this particular instance need not be held applicable at all. A particular rule against rhyming with one another particular sounds, which in his later poems Chaucer seems invariably to have followed, need not have been observed by him in what was actually, or all but, his earliest. The unfinished state of the extant translation accords with the supposition that Chaucer broke it off on adopting (possibly after conference with Gower, who likewise observes

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the rule) a more logical practice as to the point in question. Moreover, no English translation of this poem besides Chaucer's is ever known to have existed.

Whither should the youthful poet, when in search of materials on which to exercise a ready but as yet untrained hand, have so naturally turned as to French poetry, and in its domain whither so eagerly as to its universally acknowledged master-piece? French verse was the delight of the Court, into the service of which he was about this time preparing permanently to enter, and with which he had been more or less connected from his boyhood. In French, Chaucer's contemporary Gower composed not only his first longer work, but not less than fifty ballads or sonnets; and in French (as well as in English) Chaucer himself may have possibly in his youth set his own 'prentice hand to the turning of "*ballades, rondels, virelayes*." The time had not yet arrived, though it was not far distant, when his English verse was to attest his admiration of Machault, whose fame Froissart and Froissart's imitations had brought across from the French Court to the English, and when Gransson, who served King Richard II. as a squire, was extolled by his English adapter as the "flower of them that write in France." But as yet Chaucer's own tastes, his French blood, if he had any in his veins, and the familiarity with the French tongue which he had already had opportunities of acquiring, were more likely to commend to him productions of broader literary merits and a wider popularity. From these points of view, in the days of Chaucer's youth, there was no rival to the *Roman de la Rose*, one of those rare works on which the literary history of whole generations and centuries may be said to hinge. The Middle Ages, in which, from various causes, the literary intercommunication between the

nations of Europe was in some respects far livelier than it has been in later times, witnessed the appearance of several such works—diverse in kind, but similar to one another in the universality of their popularity: the *Consolation of Philosophy*, the *Divine Comedy*, the *Imitation of Christ*, the *Roman de la Rose*, the *Ship of Fools*. The favour enjoyed by the *Roman de la Rose* was in some ways the most extraordinary of all. In France, this work remained the dominant work of poetic literature, and “the source whence every rhymers drew for his needs” down to the period of the classical revival led by Ronsard (when it was edited by Clement Marot, Spenser’s early model). In England, it exercised an influence only inferior to that which belonged to it at home upon both the matter and the form of poetry down to the renaissance begun by Surrey and Wyatt. This extraordinary literary influence admits of a double explanation. But just as the authorship of the poem was very unequally divided between two personages, wholly divergent in their purposes as writers, so the popularity of the poem is probably in the main to be attributed to the second and later of the pair.

To the *trouvère* Guillaume de Lorris (who took his name from a small town in the valley of the Loire) was due the original conception of the *Roman de la Rose*, for which it is needless to suspect any extraneous source. To novelty of subject he added great ingenuity of treatment. Instead of a narrative of warlike adventures he offered to his readers a psychological romance, in which a combination of symbolisations and personified abstractions supplied the characters of the moral conflict represented. Bestiaries and Lapidaries had familiarised men’s minds with the art of finding a symbolical significance in particular animals and stones; and the language of poets was becoming a

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language of flowers. On the other hand, the personification of abstract qualities was a usage largely affected by the Latin writers of the earlier Middle Ages, and formed a favourite device of the monastic beginnings of the Christian drama. For both these literary fashions, which mildly exercised the ingenuity while deeply gratifying the tastes of mediæval readers, room was easily found by Guillaume de Lorris within a framework in itself both appropriate and graceful. He told (as reproduced by his English translator) how in a dream he seemed to himself to wake up on a May morning. Sauntering forth, he came to a garden surrounded by a wall, on which were depicted many unkindly figures, such as Hate and Villainy, and Avarice and Old Age, and another thing

"That seemèd like a hypocrite,
And it was clepèd pope holy."

Within, all seemed so delicious that, feeling ready to give an hundred pound for the chance of entering, he smote at a small wicket, and was admitted by a courteous maiden named Idleness. On the sward in the garden were dancing its owner, Sir Mirth, and a company of friends; and by the side of Gladness the dreamer saw the God of Love and his attendant, a bachelor named Sweet-looking, who bore two bows, each with five arrows. Of these bows the one was straight and fair, and the other crooked and unsightly, and each of the arrows bore the name of some quality or emotion by which love is advanced or hindered. And as the dreamer was gazing into the spring of Narcissus (the imagination), he beheld a rose-tree "charged full of roses," and, becoming enamoured of one of them, eagerly advanced to pluck the object of his passion. In the midst of this attempt he was struck by arrow upon arrow,

shot "wonder smart" by Love from the strong bow. The arrow called Company completes the victory; the dreaming poet becomes the Lover (*L'Amant*), and swears allegiance to the God of Love, who proceeds to instruct him in his laws; and the real action (if it is to be called such) of the poem begins. This consists in the Lover's desire to possess himself of the Rosebud, the opposition offered to him by powers both good and evil, and by Reason in particular, and the support which he receives from more or less discursive friends. Clearly, the conduct of such a scheme as this admits of being varied in many ways and protracted to any length; but its first conception is easy and natural, and, when it was novel to boot, was neither commonplace nor ill-chosen.

After writing about one-fifth of the 22,000 verses of which the original French poem consists, Guillaume de Lorris, who had executed his part of the task in full sympathy with the spirit of the chivalry of his times, died, and left the work to be continued by another *trouvère*, Jean de Meung (so-called from the town, near Lorris, in which he lived). "Hobbling John" took up the thread of his predecessor's poem in the spirit of a wit and an encyclopædist. Indeed, the latter appellation suits him in both its special and its general sense. Beginning with a long dialogue between Reason and the Lover, he was equally anxious to display his freedom of criticism and his universality of knowledge, both scientific and anecdotal. His vein was pre-eminently satirical and abundantly allusive; and among the chief objects of his satire are the two favourite themes of mediæval satire in general, religious hypocrisy (personified in *Faux-Semblant*, who has been described as one of the ancestors of *Tartuffe*), and the foibles of women. To the gross salt of Jean de Meung,

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even more than to the courtly perfume of Guillaume de Lorris, may be ascribed the long-lived popularity of the *Roman de la Rose*; and thus a work, of which already the theme and first conception imply a great step forwards from the previous range of mediæval poetry, became a favourite with all classes by reason of the piquancy of its flavour, and the quotable applicability of many of its passages. Out of a chivalrous allegory Jean de Meung had made a popular satire; and though in its completed form it could look for no welcome in many a court or castle—though Petrarch despised it, and Gerson, in the name of the Church, recorded a protest against it—and though a bevy of offended ladies had well-nigh taken the law into their own hands against its author—yet it commanded a vast public of admirers. And against such a popularity even an offended clergy, though aided by the sneers of the fastidious and the vehemence of the fair, is wont to contend in vain.

Chaucer's translation of this poem is thought to have been the cause which called forth from Eustace Deschamps, Machault's pupil and nephew, the complimentary *ballade* in the refrain of which the Englishman is saluted as

“Grant translateur, noble Geffroi Chaucier.”

But whether or not such was the case, his version of the *Roman de la Rose* seems, on the whole, to be a translation properly so called—although, considering the great number of MSS. existing of the French original, it would probably be no easy task to verify the assertion that in one or the other of these are to be found the few passages thought to have been interpolated by Chaucer. On the other hand, his omissions are extensive; indeed, the whole

of his translation amounts to little more than one-third of the French original. It is all the more noteworthy that Chaucer reproduces only about one-half of the part contributed by Jean de Meung, and again condenses this half to one-third of its length. In general, he has preserved the French names of localities, and even occasionally helps himself to a rhyme by retaining a French word. Occasionally he shows a certain timidity as a translator, speaking of "the tree which in France men call a pine," and pointing out, so that there may be no mistake, that mermaids are called "sereyns" (*sirènes*) in France. On the other hand, his natural vivacity now and then suggests to him a turn of phrase or an illustration of his own. As a loyal English courtier he cannot compare a fair bachelor to any one so aptly as to "the lord's son of Windsor;" and as writing not far from the time when the Statute of Kilkenny was passed, he cannot lose the opportunity of inventing an Irish parentage for Wicked-Tongue:

"So full of cursèd rage
It well agreed with his lineáge;
For him an Irishwoman bare."

The debt which Chaucer in his later works owed to the *Roman of the Rose* was considerable, and by no means confined to the favourite May-morning exordium and the recurring machinery of a vision—to the origin of which latter (the dream of Scipio related by Cicero and expounded in the widely-read Commentary of Macrobius) the opening lines of the *Romaunt* point. He owes to the French poem both the germs of felicitous phrases, such as the famous designation of Nature as "the Vicar of the Almighty Lord," and perhaps touches used by him in passages like that in which he afterwards, with further

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aid from other sources, drew the character of a true gentleman. But the main service which the work of this translation rendered to him was the opportunity which it offered of practising and perfecting a ready and happy choice of words—a service in which, perhaps, lies the chief use of all translation, considered as an exercise of style. How far he had already advanced in this respect, and how lightly our language was already moulding itself in his hands, may be seen from several passages in the poem; for instance, from that about the middle, where the old and new theme of self-contradictoriness of love is treated in endless variations. In short, Chaucer executed his task with facility, and frequently with grace, though, for one reason or another, he grew tired of it before he had carried it out with completeness. Yet the translation (and this may have been among the causes why he seems to have wearied of it) has, notwithstanding, a certain air of schoolwork; and though Chaucer's next poem, to which incontestable evidence assigns the date of the year 1369, is still very far from being wholly original, yet the step is great from the *Romaunt of the Rose* to the *Book of the Duchess*.

Among the passages of the French *Roman de la Rose* omitted in Chaucer's translation are some containing critical reflexions on the character of kings and constituted authorities—a species of observations which kings and constituted authorities have never been notorious for loving. This circumstance, together with the reference to Windsor quoted above, suggests the probability that Chaucer's connexion with the Court had not been interrupted, or had been renewed, or was on the eve of renewing itself, at the time when he wrote this translation. In becoming a courtier, he was certainly placed within the reach of so-

cial opportunities such as in his day he could nowhere else have enjoyed. In England as well as in Italy, during the fourteenth and the two following centuries, as the frequent recurrence of the notion attests, the "good" courtier seemed the perfection of the idea of gentleman. At the same time, exaggerated conceptions of the courtly breeding of Chaucer's and Froissart's age may very easily be formed; and it is almost amusing to contrast with Chaucer's generally liberal notions of manners, severe views of etiquette like that introduced by him at the close of the *Man of Law's Tale*, where he stigmatizes as a solecism the statement of the author from whom he copied his narrative, that King Ælla sent his little boy to invite the emperor to dinner. "It is best to deem he went himself."

The position which in June, 1367, we find Chaucer holding at Court is that of "Valettus" to the King, or, as a later document of May, 1368, has it, of "Valettus Camera Regis"—Valet or Yeoman of the King's Chamber. Posts of this kind, which involved the ordinary functions of personal attendance—the making of beds, the holding of torches, the laying of tables, the going on messages, etc.—were usually bestowed upon young men of good family. In due course of time a royal valet usually rose to the higher post of royal squire—either "of the household" generally, or of a more special kind. Chaucer appears in 1368 as an "esquire of less degree," his name standing seventeenth in a list of seven-and-thirty. After the year 1373 he is never mentioned by the lower, but several times by Latin equivalents of the higher, title. Frequent entries occur of the pension or salary of twenty marks granted to him for life; and, as will be seen, he soon began to be employed on missions abroad. He had thus become a regular member of the royal establishment,

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within the sphere of which we must suppose the associations of the next years of his life to have been confined. They belonged to a period of peculiar significance both for the English people and for the Plantagenet dynasty, whose glittering exploits reflected so much transitory glory on the national arms. At home, these years were the brief interval between two of the chief visitations of the Black Death (1361 and 1369); and a few years earlier the poet of the *Vision* had given voice to the sufferings of the poor. It was not, however, the mothers of the people crying for their children whom the courtly singer remembered in his elegy written in the year 1369; the woe to which he gave a poetic expression was that of a princely widower temporarily inconsolable for the loss of his first wife. In 1367 the Black Prince was conquering Castile (to be lost again before the year was out) for that interesting protégé of the Plantagenets and representative of legitimate right, Don Pedro the Cruel, whose daughter the inconsolable widower was to espouse in 1372, and whose "tragic" downfall Chaucer afterwards duly lamented in his *Monk's Tale*:—

"O noble, O worthy Pedro, glory of Spain,
Whom fortune held so high in majesty!"

As yet the star of the valiant Prince of Wales had not been quenched in the sickness which was the harbinger of death; and his younger brother, John of Gaunt, though already known for his bravery in the field (he commanded the reinforcements sent to Spain in 1367), had scarcely begun to play the prominent part in politics which he was afterwards to fill. But his day was at hand, and the anti-clerical tenour of the legislation and of the administrative changes of these years was in entire harmony with the policy of which he was to constitute himself the represent-

ative. 1365 is the year of the Statute of Provisors, and 1371 that of the dismissal of William of Wykeham.

John of Gaunt was born in 1340, and was, therefore, probably of much the same age as Chaucer, and, like him, now in the prime of life. Nothing could, accordingly, be more natural than that a more or less intimate relation should have formed itself between them. This relation, there is reason to believe, afterwards ripened, on Chaucer's part, into one of distinct political partisanship, of which there could as yet (for the reason given above) hardly be a question. There was, however, so far as we know, nothing in Chaucer's tastes and tendencies to render it antecedently unlikely that he should have been ready to follow the fortunes of a prince who entered the political arena as an adversary of clerical predominance. Had Chaucer been a friend of it in principle, he would hardly have devoted his first efforts as a writer to the translation of the *Roman de la Rose*. In so far, therefore—and in truth it is not very far—as John of Gaunt may be afterwards said to have been a Wycliffite, the same description might probably be applied to Chaucer. With such sentiments a personal orthodoxy was fully reconcileable in both patron and follower; and the so-called *Chaucer's A. B. C.*, a version of a prayer to the Virgin in a French poetical "Pilgrimage," might with equal probability have been put together by him either early or late in the course of his life. There was, however, a tradition, repeated by Speght, that this piece was composed "at the request of Blanche, Duchess of Lancaster, as a prayer for her private use, being a woman in her religion very devout." If so, it must have been written before the Duchess's death, which occurred in 1369; and we may imagine it, if we please, with its twenty-three initial letters blazoned in red and blue and

gold on a flyleaf inserted in the Book of the pious Duchess—herself, in the fervent language of the poem, an illuminated calendar, as being lighted in this world with the Virgin's holy name.

In the autumn of 1369, then, the Duchess Blanche died an early death; and it is pleasing to know that John of Gaunt, to whom his marriage with her had brought wealth and a dukedom, ordered services, in pious remembrance of her, to be held at her grave. The elaborate elegy which—very possibly at the widowed Duke's request—was composed by Chaucer, leaves no doubt as to the identity of the lady whose loss it deploras:—

“ . . . Goodë fairë *White* she hight;
Thus was my lady namèd right;
For she was both fair and bright.”

But, in accordance with the taste of his age, which shunned such sheer straightforwardness in poetry, the *Book of the Duchess* contains no further transparent reference to the actual circumstances of the wedded life which had come to so premature an end—for John of Gaunt had married Blanche of Lancaster in 1359—and an elaborate framework is constructed round the essential theme of the poem. Already, however, the instinct of Chaucer's own poetic genius had taught him the value of personal directness; and, artificially as the course of the poem is arranged, it begins in the most artless and effective fashion with an account given by the poet of his own sleeplessness and its cause, already referred to—an opening so felicitous that it was afterwards imitated by Froissart. And so, Chaucer continues, as he could not sleep, to drive the night away he sat upright in his bed reading a “romance,” which he thought better entertainment than chess

or draughts. The book which he read was the *Metamorphoses* of Ovid; and in it he chanced on the tale of Ceyx and Alcyone—the lovers whom, on their premature death, the compassion of Juno changed into the sea-birds that bring good-luck to mariners. Of this story (whether Chaucer derived it direct from Ovid, or from Machault's French version, is disputed), the earlier part serves as the introduction to the poem. The story breaks off—with the dramatic abruptness in which Chaucer is a master, and which so often distinguishes his versions from their originals—at the death of Alcyone, caused by her grief at the tidings brought by Morpheus of her husband's death. Thus subtly the god of sleep and the death of a loving wife mingle their images in the poet's mind; and with these upon him, he falls asleep "right upon his book."

What more natural, after this, than the dream which came to him? It was May, and he lay in his bed at morning-time, having been awakened out of his slumbers by the "small-fowls," who were carolling forth their notes—"some high, some low, and all of one accord." The birds singing their matins around the poet, and the sun shining brightly through his windows stained with many a figure of poetic legend, and upon the walls painted in fine colours, "both text and gloss, and all the Rômaunt of the Rose"—is not this a picture of Chaucer by his own hand, on which one may love to dwell? And just as the poem has begun with a touch of nature, and at the beginning of its main action has returned to nature, so through the whole of its course it maintains the same tone. The sleeper awakened—still, of course, in his dream—hears the sound of the horn, and the noise of huntsmen preparing for the chase. He rises, saddles his horse, and follows to the forest, where the Emperor Octavian (a favourite character of Carolingian

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legend, and pleasantly revived under this aspect by the modern romanticist, Ludwig Tieck—in Chaucer's poem probably a flattering allegory for the King) is holding his hunt. The deer having been started, the poet is watching the course of the hunt, when he is approached by a dog, which leads him to a solitary spot in a thicket among mighty trees; and here of a sudden he comes upon a man in black, sitting silently by the side of a huge oak. How simple and how charming is the device of the faithful dog acting as a guide into the mournful solitude of the faithful man! For the knight whom the poet finds thus silent and alone, is rehearsing to himself a lay, "a manner song," in these words:—

"I have of sorrow so great wone,
That joye get I never none,
Now that I see my lady bright,
Which I have loved with all my might,
Is from me dead, and is agone.
Alas! Death, what aileth thee
That thou should'st not have taken me,
When that thou took'st my lady sweet?
That was so fair, so fresh, so free,
So goodë, that men may well see
Of all goodnéss she had no meet."

Seeing the knight overcome by his grief, and on the point of fainting, the poet accosts him, and courteously demands his pardon for the intrusion. Thereupon the disconsolate mourner, touched by this token of sympathy, breaks out into the tale of his sorrow which forms the real subject of the poem. It is a lament for the loss of a wife who was hard to gain (the historical basis of this is unknown, but great heiresses are usually hard to gain for cadets even of royal houses), and whom, alas! her husband was to lose so soon after he had gained her. Nothing could be simpler,

and nothing could be more delightful, than the Black Knight's description of his lost lady as she was at the time when he wooed and almost despaired of winning her. Many of the touches in this description—and among them some of the very happiest—are, it is true, borrowed from the courtly Machault; but nowhere has Chaucer been happier, both in his appropriations and in the way in which he has really converted them into beauties of his own, than in this, perhaps the most lifelike picture of maidenhood in the whole range of our literature. Or is not the following the portrait of an English girl, all life and all innocence—a type not belonging, like its opposite, to any “period” in particular?

“I saw her dance so comely,
 Carol and sing so sweetly,
 And laugh, and play so womanly,
 And lookē so debónairly,
 So goodly speak and so friendly,
 That, certes, I trow that nevermore
 Was seen so blissful a treasúre.
 For every hair upon her head,
 Sooth to say, it was not red,
 Nor yellow neither, nor brown it was,
 Methought most likē gold it was.
 And ah! what eyes my lady had,
 Debónair, goodē, glad and sad,
 Simple, of good size, not too wide.
 Thereto her look was not aside,
 Nor overthwart;”

but so well set that whoever beheld her was drawn and taken up by it, every part of him. Her eyes seemed every now and then as if she were inclined to be merciful, such was the delusion of fools: a delusion in very truth, for

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"It was no counterfeited thing;
It was her ownë pure looking;
So the goddess, dame Natüre,
Had made them open by measüre
And close; for were she never so glad,
Not foolishly her looks were spread,
Nor wildëly, though that she play'd;
But ever, methought, her eyen said,
'By God, my wrath is all forgiven.'"

And at the same time she liked to live so happily that dulness was afraid of her; she was neither too "sober" nor too glad; in short, no creature had ever more measure in all things. Such was the lady whom the knight had won for himself, and whose virtues he cannot weary of rehearsing to himself or to a sympathising auditor.

"'Sir' quoth I, 'where is she now?'
'Now?' quoth he, and stopped anon;
Therewith he waxed as dead as stone,
And said: 'Alas that I was bore!
That was the loss! and heretofore
I told to thee what I had lost.
Bethink thee what I said. Thou know'st
In sooth full little what thou meanest:
I have lost morë than thou weenest.
God wot, alas! right that was she.'
'Alas, sir, how? what may that be?'
'She is dead.' 'Nay?' 'Yes, by my truth!'
'Is that your loss? by God, it is ruth.'"

And with that word, the hunt breaking up, the knight and the poet depart to a "long castle with white walls on a rich hill" (Richmond?), where a bell tolls and awakens the poet from his slumbers, to let him find himself lying in his bed, and the book, with its legend of love and sleep, resting in his hand. One hardly knows at whom more to

wonder—whether at the distinguished French scholar who sees so many trees that he cannot see a forest, and who, not content with declaring the *Book of the Duchess*, as a whole as well as in its details, a servile imitation of Machault, pronounces it at the same time one of Chaucer's feeblest productions; or at the equally eminent English scholar who, with a flippancy which for once ceases to be amusing, opines that Chaucer ought to "have felt ashamed of himself for this most lame and impotent conclusion" of a poem "full of beauties," and ought to have been "caned for it!" Not only was this "lame and impotent conclusion" imitated by Spenser in his lovely elegy, *Daphnaida*;¹ but it is the first passage in Chaucer's writings revealing, one would have thought unmistakably, the dramatic power which was among his most characteristic gifts. The charm of this poem, notwithstanding all the artificialities with which it is overlaid, lies in its simplicity and truth to nature. A real human being is here brought before us instead of a vague abstraction; and the glow of life is on the page, though it has to tell of death and mourning. Chaucer is finding his strength by dipping into the true spring of poetic inspiration; and in his dreams he is awaking to the real capabilities of his genius. Though he is still uncertain of himself and dependent on others, it seems not too much to say that already in this

¹ I have been anticipated in pointing out this fact by the author of the biographical essay on *Spenser* in this series—an essay to which I cannot help taking this opportunity of offering a tribute of sincere admiration. It may not be an undesigned coincidence that the inconsolable widower of the *Daphnaida* is named Alecyon, while Chaucer's poem begins with a reference to the myth of Ceyx and Alecyone. Sir Arthur Gorges reappears as Alecyon in *Colin Clout's come home again*.

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Book of the Duchess he is in some measure an original poet.

How unconscious, at the same time, this waking must have been is manifest from what little is known concerning the course of both his personal and his literary life during the next few years. But there is a tide in the lives of poets, as in those of other men, on the use or neglect of which their future seems largely to depend. For more reasons than one, Chaucer may have been rejoiced to be employed on the two missions abroad, which apparently formed his chief occupation during the years 1370-1373. In the first place, the love of books, which he so frequently confesses, must in him have been united to a love of seeing men and cities; few are observers of character without taking pleasure in observing it. Of his literary labours he probably took little thought during these years; although the visit which in the course of them he paid to Italy may be truly said to have constituted the turning-point in his literary life. No work of his can be ascribed to this period with certainty; none of importance has ever been ascribed to it.

On the latter of these missions Chaucer, who left England in the winter of 1372, visited Genoa and Florence. His object at the former city was to negotiate concerning the settlement of a Genoese mercantile factory in one of our ports, for in this century there already existed between Genoa and England a commercial intercourse, which is illustrated by the obvious etymology of the popular term *jane* occurring in Chaucer in the sense of any small coin.¹ It has been supposed that on this journey he met at Padua

¹ "A jane" is in the *Clerk's Tale* said to be a sufficient value at which to estimate the "stormy people."

Petrarch, whose residence was near by at Arqua. The statement of the *Clerk* in the *Canterbury Tales* that he learnt the story of patient Griseldis "at Padua of a worthy clerk . . . now dead," who was called "Francis Petrarch, the laureate poet," may, of course, merely imply that Chaucer borrowed the *Clerk's Tale* from Petrarch's Latin version of the original by Boccaccio. But the meeting which the expression suggests may have actually taken place, and may have been accompanied by the most suitable conversation which the imagination can supply; while, on the other hand, it is a conjecture unsupported by any evidence whatever, that a previous meeting between the pair had occurred at Milan in 1368, when Lionel, Duke of Clarence, was married to his second wife with great pomp in the presence of Petrarch and of Froissart. The really noteworthy point is this: that while neither (as a matter of course) the translated *Romaunt of the Rose* nor the *Book of the Duchess* exhibits any traces of Italian influence, the same assertion cannot safely be made with regard to any important poem produced by Chaucer after the date of this Italian journey. The literature of Italy, which was—and in the first instance through Chaucer himself—to exercise so powerful an influence upon the progress of our own, was at last opened to him, though in what measure, and by what gradations, must remain undecided. Before him lay both the tragedies and the comedies, as he would have called them, of the learned and brilliant Boccaccio—both his epic poems and that inexhaustible treasure-house of stories which Petrarch praised for its pious and grave contents, albeit they were mingled with others of undeniable jocoseness—the immortal *Decamerone*. He could examine the refined gold of Petrarch's own verse, with its exquisite variations of its favourite pure theme and its ad-

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equate treatment of other elevated subjects; and he might gaze down the long vista of pictured reminiscences, grand and sombre, called up by the mightiest Muse of the Middle Ages, the Muse of Dante. Chaucer's genius, it may be said at once, was not *transformed* by its contact with Italian literature; for a conscious desire as well as a conscientious effort is needed for bringing about such a transformation; and to compare the results of his first Italian journey with those of Goethe's pilgrimage across the Alps, for instance, would be palpably absurd. It might even be doubted whether, for the themes which he was afterwards likely to choose, and actually did choose, for poetic treatment, the materials at his command in French (and English) poetry and prose would not have sufficed him. As it was, it seems probable that he took many things from Italian literature; it is certain that he learnt much from it. There seems every reason to conclude that the influence of Italian study upon Chaucer made him more assiduous, as well as more careful, in the employment of his poetic powers—more hopeful at once, if one may so say, and more assured of himself.

Meanwhile, soon after his return from his second foreign mission, he was enabled to begin a more settled life at home. He had acquitted himself to the satisfaction of the Crown, as is shown by the grant for life of a daily pitcher of wine, made to him on April 23rd, 1374, the merry day of the Feast of St. George. It would, of course, be a mistake to conclude, from any seeming analogies of later times, that this grant, which was received by Chaucer in money-value, and which seems finally to have been commuted for an annual payment of twenty marks, betokened on the part of the King a spirit of patronage appropriate to the claims of literary leisure. How remote such a no

tion was from the minds of Chaucer's employers is proved by the terms of the patent by which, in the month of June following, he was appointed Comptroller of the Customs and Subsidy of wools, skins, and tanned hides in the port of London. This patent (doubtless according to the usual official form) required him to write the rolls of his office with his own hand, to be continually present there, and to perform his duties in person, and not by deputy. By a warrant of the same month Chaucer was granted the pension of 10*l.* for life already mentioned, for services rendered by him and his wife to the Duke and Duchess of Lancaster and to the Queen; by two successive grants of the year 1375 he received further pecuniary gratifications of a more or less temporary nature; and he continued to receive his pension and allowance for robes as one of the royal esquires. We may, therefore, conceive of him as now established in a comfortable as well as seemingly secure position. His regular work as comptroller (of which a few scattered documentary vestiges are preserved) scarcely offers more points for the imagination to exercise itself upon than Burns's excisemanship or Wordsworth's collectorship of stamps,¹ though doubtless it must have brought him into constant contact with merchants and with shipmen, and may have suggested to him many a broad descriptive touch. On the other hand, it is not necessary to be a poet to feel something of that ineffable *ennui* of official life, which even the self-compensatory practice of arriving late at one's desk, but departing from it early, can only abate, but not take away. The passage has been often quoted in which Chaucer half implies a feeling of the kind, and tells how

¹ It is a curious circumstance that Dryden should have received, as a reward for his political services as a satirist, an office almost identical with Chaucer's. But he held it for little more than a year.

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he sought recreation from what Charles Lamb would have called his "works" at the Custom House in the reading, as we know he did in the writing, of other books:—

"... When thy labour done all is,
And hast y-madē reckonings,
Instead of rest and newē things
Thou go'st home to thine house anon,
And there as dumb as any stone
Thou sittest at another book."

The house at home was doubtless that in Aldgate, of which the lease to Chaucer, bearing date May, 1374, has been discovered; and to this we may fancy Chaucer walking morning and evening from the river-side, past the Postern Gate by the Tower. Already, however, in 1376, the routine of his occupations appears to have been interrupted by his engagement on some secret service under Sir John Burley; and in the following year, and in 1378, he was repeatedly abroad in the service of the Crown. On one of his journeys in the last-named year he was attached in a subordinate capacity to the embassy sent to negotiate for the marriage with the French King Charles V.'s daughter Mary to the young King Richard II., who had succeeded to his grandfather in 1377 — one of those matrimonial missions which, in the days of both Plantagenets and Tudors, formed so large a part of the functions of European diplomacy, and which not unfrequently, as in this case at least ultimately, came to nothing. A later journey in May of the same year took Chaucer once more to Italy, whither he had been sent with Sir Edward Berkeley to treat with Bernardo Visconti, joint lord of Milan, and "scourge of Lombardy," and Sir John Hawkwood — the former of whom finds a place in that brief mirror of magistrates, the *Monk's Tale*. It was on this occasion that of the two

persons whom, according to custom, Chaucer appointed to appear for him in the Courts during his absence, one was Jchn Gower, whose name as that of the second poet of his age is indissolubly linked with Chaucer's own.

So far, the new reign, which had opened amidst doubts and difficulties for the country, had to the faithful servant of the dynasty brought an increase of royal good-will. In 1381—after the suppression of the great rebellion of the villeins—King Richard II. had married the princess whose name for a season linked together the history of two countries the destinies of which had before that age, as they have since, lain far asunder. Yet both Bohemia and England, besides the nations which received from the former the impulses communicated to it by the latter, have reason to remember Queen Anne, the learned and the good; since to her was probably due, in the first instance, the intellectual intercourse between her native and her adopted country. There seems every reason to believe that it was the approach of this marriage which Chaucer celebrated in one of the brightest and most jocund marriage-poems ever composed by a laureate's hand; and if this was so, he cannot but have augmented the favour with which he was regarded at Court. When, therefore, by May, 1382, his foreign journeys had come to an end, we do not wonder to find that, without being called upon to relinquish his former office, he was appointed in addition to the Comptrollership of the Petty Customs in the Port of London, of which post he was allowed to execute the duties by deputy. In November, 1384, he received permission to absent himself from his old comptrollership for a month; and in February, 1385, was allowed to appoint a (permanent) deputy for this office also. During the month of October, 1386, he sat in Parliament at Westminster as one of the Knights of the Shire

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for Kent, where we may consequently assume him to have possessed landed property. His fortunes, therefore, at this period had clearly risen to their height; and naturally enough his commentators are anxious to assign to these years the sunniest, as well as some of the most elaborate, of his literary productions. It is altogether probable that the amount of leisure now at Chaucer's command enabled him to carry into execution some of the works for which he had gathered materials abroad and at home, and to prepare others. Inasmuch as it contains the passage cited above, referring to Chaucer's official employment, his poem called the *House of Fame* must have been written between 1374 and 1386 (when Chaucer quitted office), and probably is to be dated near the latter year. Inasmuch as both this poem and *Troilus and Cressid* are mentioned in the Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women*, they must have been written earlier than it; and the dedication of *Troilus* to Gower and Strode very well agrees with the relations known to have existed about this time between Chaucer and his brother-poet. Very probably all these three works may have been put forth, in more or less rapid succession, during this fortunate season of Chaucer's life.

A fortunate season—for in it the prince who, from whatever cause, was indisputably the patron of Chaucer and his wife, had, notwithstanding his unpopularity among the lower orders, and the deep suspicion fostered by hostile whisperings against him in his royal nephew's breast, still contrived to hold the first place by the throne. Though serious danger had already existed of a conflict between the King and his uncle, yet John of Gaunt and his Duchess Constance had been graciously dismissed with a royal gift of golden crowns, when, in July, 1386, he

took his departure for the Continent, to busy himself till his return home in November, 1389, with the affairs of Castile, and with claims arising out of his disbursements there. The reasons for Chaucer's attachment to this particular patron are probably not far to seek; on the precise nature of the relation between them it is useless to speculate. Before Wyclif's death in 1384, John of Gaunt had openly dissociated himself from the reformer; and whatever may have been the case in his later years, it was certainly not as a follower of his old patron that at this date Chaucer could have been considered a Wycliffite.

Again, this period of Chaucer's life may be called fortunate, because during it he seems to have enjoyed the only congenial friendships of which any notice remains to us. The poem of *Troilus and Cressid* is, as was just noted, dedicated to "the moral Gower and the philosophical Strode." Ralph Strode was a Dominican of Jedburgh Abbey, a travelled scholar, whose journeys had carried him as far as the Holy Land, and who was celebrated as a poet in both the Latin and the English tongue, and as a theologian and philosopher. In connexion with speculations concerning Chaucer's relations to Wycliffism it is worth noting that Strode, who, after his return to England, was appointed to superintend several new monasteries, was the author of a series of controversial arguments against Wyclif. The tradition, according to which he taught one of Chaucer's sons, is untrustworthy. Of John Gower's life little more is known than of Chaucer's; he appears to have been a Suffolk man, holding manors in that county as well as in Essex, but occasionally to have resided in Kent. At the period of which we are speaking, he may be supposed, besides his French productions, to have already published his Latin *Vox Clamantis*—a

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poem which, beginning with an allegorical narrative of Wat Tyler's rebellion, passes on to a series of reflexions on the causes of the movement, conceived in a spirit of indignation against the corruptions of the Church, but not of sympathy with Wycliffism. This is no doubt the poem which obtained for Gower the epithet "moral" (*i. e.*, sententious) applied to him by Chaucer, and afterwards by Dunbar, Hawes, and Shakspeare. Gower's *Vox Clamantis* and other Latin poems (including one "against the astuteness of the Evil One in the matter of Lollardry") are forgotten; but his English *Confessio Amantis* has retained its right to a place of honour in the history of our literature. The most interesting part of this poem, its *Prologue*, has already been cited as of value for our knowledge of the political and social condition of its times. It gives expression to a conservative tone and temper of mind; and, like many conservative minds, Gower's had adopted, or affected to adopt, the conviction that the world was coming to an end. The cause of the anticipated catastrophe he found in the division, or absence of concord and love, manifest in the condition of things around. The intensity of strife visible among the conflicting elements of which the world, like the individual human being, is composed, too clearly announced the imminent end of all things. Would that a new Arion might arise to make peace where now is hate; but, alas! the prevailing confusion is such that God alone may set it right. But the poem which follows cannot be said to sustain the interest excited by this introduction. Its machinery was obviously suggested by that of the *Roman de la Rose*, though, as Warton has happily phrased it, Gower, after a fashion of his own, blends Ovid's *Art of Love* with the Breviary. The poet, wander-



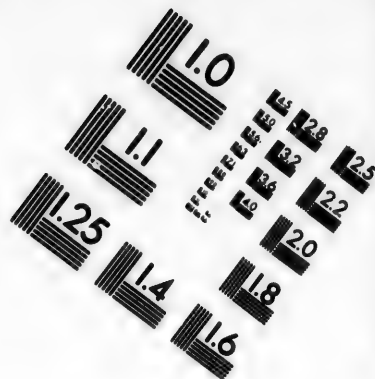
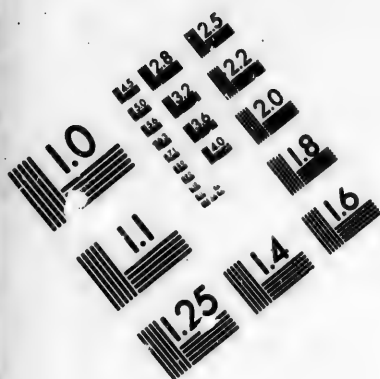
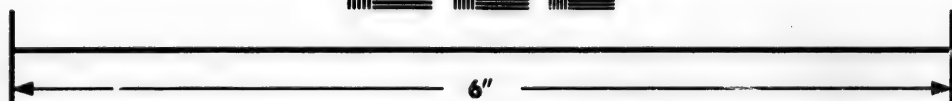
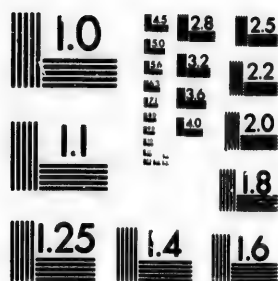


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ing about in a forest, while suffering under the smart of Cupid's dart, meets Venus, the Goddess of Love, who urges him, as one upon the point of death, to make his full confession to her clerk or priest, the holy father Genius. This confession hereupon takes place by means of question and answer; both penitent and confessor entering at great length into an examination of the various sins and weaknesses of human nature, and of their remedies, and illustrating their observations by narratives, brief or elaborate, from Holy Writ, sacred legend, ancient history, and romantic story. Thus Gower's book, as he says at its close, stands "between earnest and game," and might be fairly described as a *Romaunt of the Rose*, without either the descriptive grace of Guillaume de Lorris, or the wicked wit of Jean de Meung, but full of learning and matter, and written by an author certainly not devoid of the art of telling stories. The mind of this author was thoroughly didactic in its bent; for the beauty of nature he has no real feeling; and though his poem, like so many of Chaucer's, begins in the month of May, he is (unnecessarily) careful to tell us that his object in going forth was not to "sing with the birds." He could not, like Chaucer, transfuse old things into new, but there is enough in his character as a poet to explain the friendship between the pair, of which we hear at the very time when Gower was probably preparing his *Confessio Amantis* for publication.

They are said afterwards to have become enemies; but in the absence of any real evidence to that effect, we cannot believe Chaucer to have been likely to quarrel with one whom he had certainly both trusted and admired. Nor had literary life in England already advanced to a stage of development of which, as in the Elizabethan and Augustan ages, literary jealousy was an indispensable ac-

companionent. Chaucer is supposed to have attacked Gower in a passage of the *Canterbury Tales*, where he incidentally declares his dislike (in itself extremely commendable) of a particular kind of sensational stories, instancing the subject of one of the numerous tales in the *Confessio Amantis*. There is, however, no reason whatever for supposing Chaucer to have here intended a reflection on his brother poet, more especially as the *Man of Law*, after uttering the censure, relates, though probably not from Gower, a story on a subject of a different kind likewise treated by him. It is scarcely more suspicious that when Gower, in a second edition of his chief work, dedicated in 1393 to Henry, Earl of Derby (afterwards Henry IV.), judiciously omitted the exordium and altered the close of the first edition—both of which were complimentary to Richard II.—he left out, together with its surrounding context, a passage conveying a friendly challenge to Chaucer as a “disciple and poet of the God of Love.”

In any case there could have been no political difference between them, for Chaucer was at all times in favour with the House of Lancaster, towards whose future head Gower so early contrived to assume a correct attitude. To him—a man of substance, with landed property in three counties—the rays of immediate court-favour were probably of less importance than to Chaucer; but it is not necessity only which makes courtiers of so many of us: some are born to the vocation, and Gower strikes one as naturally more prudent and cautious—in short, more of a politic personage—than Chaucer. He survived him eight years—a blind invalid, in whose mind at least we may hope nothing dimmed or blurred the recollection of a friend to whom he owes much of his fame.

In a still nearer relationship—on which the works of

Chaucer that may certainly or probably be assigned to this period throw some light—it seems impossible to describe him as having been fortunate. Whatever may have been the date and circumstances of his marriage, it seems, at all events in its later years, not to have been a happy one. The allusions to Chaucer's personal experience of married life in both *Troilus and Cressid* and the *House of Fame* are not of a kind to be entirely explicable by that tendency to make a mock of women and of marriage, which has frequently been characteristic of satirists, and which was specially popular in an age cherishing the wit of Jean de Meung, and complacently corroborating its theories from naughty Latin fables, French *fabliaux*, and Italian *novelle*. Both in *Troilus and Cressid* and in the *House of Fame* the poet's tone, when he refers to himself, is generally dolorous; but while both poems contain unmistakeable references to the joylessness of his own married life, in the latter he speaks of himself as "suffering debonairly"—or, as we should say, putting a good face upon—a state "desperate of all bliss." And it is a melancholy though half sarcastic glimpse into his domestic privacy which he incidentally, and it must be allowed rather unnecessarily, gives in the following passage of the same poem:—

"'Awake!' to me he said,
In voice and tone the very same
That useth one whom I could name;
And with that voice, sooth to say(n)
My mind returned to me again;
For it was goodly said to me;
So was it never wont to be."

In other words, the kindness of the voice reassured him that it was *not* the same as that which he was wont to hear close to his pillow! Again, the entire tone of the

Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women* is not that of a happy lover; although it would be pleasant enough, considering that the lady who imposes on the poet the penalty of celebrating *good* women is Alcestis, the type of faithful wifehood, to interpret the poem as not only an *amende honorable* to the female sex in general, but a token of reconciliation to the poet's wife in particular. Even in the joyous *Assembly of Fowls*, a marriage-poem, the same discord already makes itself heard; for it cannot be without meaning that in his dream the poet is told by "African"—

"... Thou of love hast lost thy taste, I guess,
As sick men have of sweet and bitterness;"

and that he confesses for himself that, though he has read much of love, he knows not of it by experience. While, however, we reluctantly accept the conclusion that Chaucer was unhappy as a husband, we must at the same time decline, because the husband was a poet, and one of the most genial of poets, to cast all the blame upon the wife, and to write her down a shrew. It is unfortunate, no doubt, but it is likewise inevitable, that at so great a distance of time the rights and wrongs of a conjugal disagreement or estrangement cannot with safety be adjusted. Yet again, because we refuse to blame Philippa, we are not obliged to blame Chaucer. At the same time, it must not be concealed that his name occurs in the year 1380 in connexion with a legal process, of which the most obvious, though not the only possible, explanation is that he had been guilty of a grave infidelity towards his wife. Such discoveries as this last we might be excused for wishing unmade.

Considerable uncertainty remains with regard to the dates of the poems belonging to this seemingly, in all re-

spects but one, fortunate period of Chaucer's life. Of one of these works, however, which has had the curious fate to be dated and re-dated by a succession of happy conjectures, the last and happiest of all may be held to have definitively fixed the occasion. This is the charming poem called the *Assembly of Fowls*, or *Parliament of Birds*—a production which seems so English, so fresh from nature's own inspiration, so instinct with the gaiety of Chaucer's own heart, that one is apt to overlook in it the undeniable vestiges of foreign influences, both French and Italian. At its close the poet confesses that he is always reading, and therefore hopes that he may at last read something "so to fare the better." But with all this evidence of study the *Assembly of Fowls* is chiefly interesting as showing how Chaucer had now begun to select as well as to assimilate his loans; how, while he was still moving along well-known tracks, his eyes were joyously glancing to the right and the left; and how the source of most of his imagery, at all events, he already found in the merry England around him, even as he had chosen for his subject one of real national interest.

Anne of Bohemia, daughter of the great Emperor Charles IV., and sister of King Wenceslas, had been successively betrothed to a Bavarian prince and to a Margrave of Meissen, before—after negotiations which, according to Froissart, lasted a year—her hand was given to the young King Richard II. of England. This sufficiently explains the general scope of the *Assembly of Fowls*, an allegorical poem written on or about St. Valentine's Day, 1381—eleven months, or nearly a year, after which date the marriage took place. On the morning sacred to lovers, the poet (in a dream, of course, and this time conducted by the arch-dreamer Scipio in person) enters a garden con-

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taining in it the temple of the God of Love, and filled with inhabitants mythological and allegorical. Here he sees the noble goddess Nature, seated upon a hill of flowers, and around her "all the fowls that be," assembled as by time-honoured custom on St. Valentine's Day, "when every fowl comes there to choose her mate." Their huge noise and hubbub is reduced to order by Nature, who assigns to each fowl its proper place—the birds of prey highest; then those that eat according to natural inclination—

"Worm or thing of which I tell no tale;"

then those that live by seed; and the various members of the several classes are indicated with amusing vivacity and point, from the royal eagle "that with his sharp look pierceth the sun," and "other eagles of a lower kind" downwards. We can only find room for a portion of the company:—

"The sparrow, Venus' son; the nightingale
That clepeth forth the freshë leavës new;
The swallow, murd'rer of the beës small,
That honey make of flowers fresh of hue;
The wedded turtle, with his heartë true;
The peacock, with his angels' feathers bright,
The pheasant, scorner of the cock by night.

"The waker goose, the cuckoo, ever unkind;
The popinjay, full of delicacy;
The drake, destroyer of his ownë kind;
The stork, avenger of adultery;
The cormorant, hot and full of gluttony;
The crows and ravens with their voice of care;
And the throstle old, and the frosty fieldfare."

Naturalists must be left to explain some of these epithets and designations, not all of which rest on allusions as easily

understood as that recalling the goose's exploit on the Capitol; but the vivacity of the whole description speaks for itself. One is reminded of Aristophanes' feathered chorus; but birds are naturally the delight of poets, and were befriended by Dante himself.

Hereupon the action of the poem opens. A female eagle is wooed by three suitors—all eagles; but among them the first, or royal eagle, discourses in the manner most likely to conciliate favour. Before the answer is given, a pause furnishes an opportunity to the other fowls for delighting in the sound of their own voices, Dame Nature proposing that each class of birds shall, through the beak of its representative "agitator," express its opinion on the problem before the assembly. There is much humour in the readiness of the goose to rush in with a ready-made resolution, and in the smart reproof administered by the sparrow-hawk amidst the uproar of "the gentle fowls all." At last Nature silences the tumult, and the lady-eagle delivers her answer, to the effect that she cannot make up her mind for a year to come; but inasmuch as Nature has advised her to choose the royal eagle, his is clearly the most favourable prospect. Whereupon, after certain fowls had sung a roundel, "as was always the usance," the assembly, like some human Parliaments, breaks up with shouting;¹ and the dreamer awakes to resume his reading.

Very possibly the *Assembly of Fowls* was at no great interval of time either followed or preceded by two poems of far inferior interest—the *Complaint of Mars* (apparently afterwards amalgamated with that of *Venus*), which is

¹ "Than all the birdis song with sic a schout
That I annone awoik quhair that I lay."

DUNBAR, *The Thrissill and the Reis*.

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supposed to be sung by a bird on St. Valentine's morning, and the fragment *Of Queen Anelida and false Arcite*. There are, however, reasons which make a less early date probable in the case of the latter production, the history of the origin and purpose of which can hardly be said as yet to be removed out of the region of mere speculation. In any case, neither of these poems can be looked upon as preparations, on Chaucer's part, for the longer work on which he was to expend so much labour; but in a sense this description would apply to the translation which, probably before he wrote *Troilus and Cressid*, certainly before he wrote the Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women*, he made of the famous Latin work of Boëthius, "the just man in prison," on the *Consolation of Philosophy*. This book was, and very justly so, one of the favourite manuals of the Middle Ages, and a treasure-house of religious wisdom to centuries of English writers. "Boice of Consolacioun" is cited in the *Romaunt of the Rose*; and the list of passages imitated by Chaucer from the martyr of Catholic orthodoxy and Roman freedom of speech is exceedingly long. Among them are the ever-recurring diatribe against the fickleness of fortune, and (through the medium of Dante) the reflection on the distinction between gentle birth and a gentle life. Chaucer's translation was not made at second-hand; if not always easy, it is conscientious, and interpolated with numerous glosses and explanations thought necessary by the translator. The metre of *The Former Life* he at one time or another turned into verse of his own.

Perhaps the most interesting of the quotations made in Chaucer's poems from Boëthius occurs in his *Troilus and Cressid*, one of the many mediæval versions of an episode engrafted by the lively fancy of an Anglo-Norman *trouvère*

upon the deathless, and in its literary variations incomparably luxuriant, growth of the story of Troy. On Benoit de Sainte-Maure's poem Guido de Colonna founded his Latin-prose romance; and this again, after being reproduced in languages and by writers almost innumerable, served Boccaccio as the foundation of his poem *Filostrato*—i. e., the victim of love. All these works, together with Chaucer's *Troilus and Cressid*, with Lydgate's *Troy-Book*, with Henryson's *Testament of Cressid* (and in a sense even with Shakspeare's drama on the theme of Chaucer's poem), may be said to belong to the second cycle of modern versions of the tale of Troy divine. Already their earlier predecessors had gone far astray from Homer, of whom they only knew by hearsay, relying for their facts on late Latin epitomes, which freely mutilated and perverted the Homeric narrative in favour of the Trojans—the supposed ancestors of half the nations of Europe. Accordingly, Chaucer, in a well-known passage in his *House of Fame*, regrets, with sublime coolness, how "one said that Homer" wrote "lies,"

"Feigning in his poetries
And was to Greekës favouráble.
Therefore held he it but fable."

But the courtly poets of the romantic age of literature went a step further, and added a mediæval colouring all their own. One converts the Sibyl into a nun, and makes her admonish Æneas to tell his beads. Another—it is Chaucer's successor Lydgate—introduces Priam's sons exercising their bodies in tournaments and their minds in the glorious play of chess, and causes the memory of Hector to be consecrated by the foundation of a chantry of priests who are to pray for the repose of his soul. A third final-

ly condemns the erring Cressid to be stricken with leprosy, and to wander about with cup and clapper, like the unhappy lepers in the great cities of the Middle Ages. Everything, in short, is transfused by the spirit of the adapters' own times; and so far are these writers from any weakly sense of anachronism in describing Troy as if it were a moated and turreted city of the later Middle Ages, that they are only careful now and then to protest their own truthfulness when anything in their narrative seems *unlike* the days in which they write.

But Chaucer, though his poem is, to start with, only an English reproduction of an Italian version of a Latin translation of a French poem, and though in most respects it shares the characteristic features of the body of poetic fiction to which it belongs, is far from being a mere translator. Apart from several remarkable reminiscences introduced by Chaucer from Dante, as well as from the irrepressible *Romaunt of the Rose*, he has changed his original in points which are not mere matters of detail or questions of convenience. In accordance with the essentially dramatic bent of his own genius, some of these changes have reference to the aspect of the characters and the conduct of the plot, as well as to the whole spirit of the conception of the poem. Cressid (who, by the way, is a widow at the outset—whether she had children or not Chaucer nowhere found stated, and therefore leaves undecided) may at first sight strike the reader as a less consistent character in Chaucer than in Boccaccio. But there is true art in the way in which, in the English poem, our sympathy is first aroused for the heroine, whom, in the end, we cannot but condemn. In Boccaccio, Cressid is fair and false—one of those fickle creatures with whom Italian literature, and Boccaccio in particular, so largely deal, and

whose presentment merely repeats to us the old cynical half-truth as to woman's weakness. The English poet, though he does not pretend that his heroine was "religious" (i.e., a nun to whom earthly love is a sin), endears her to us from the first; so much that "O the pity of it" seems the hardest verdict we can ultimately pass upon her conduct. How, then, is the catastrophe of the action, the falling away of Cressid from her truth to Troilus, poetically explained? By an appeal—pedantically put, perhaps, and as it were dragged in violently by means of a truncated quotation from Boëthius—to the fundamental difficulty concerning the relations between poor human life and the government of the world. This, it must be conceded, is a considerably deeper problem than the nature of woman. Troilus and Cressid, the hero sinned against and the sinning heroine, are the *victims of Fate*. Who shall cast a stone against those who are, but like the rest of us, predestined to their deeds and to their doom; since the co-existence of free-will with predestination does not admit of proof? This solution of the conflict may be morally as well as theologically unsound; it certainly is æsthetically faulty; but it is the reverse of frivolous or commonplace.

Or let us turn from Cressid, "matchless in beauty," and warm with sweet life, but not ignoble even in the season of her weakness, to another personage of the poem. In itself the character of Pandarus is one of the most revolting which imagination can devise; so much so that the name has become proverbial for the most despicable of human types. With Boccaccio Pandarus is Cressid's cousin and Troilus' youthful friend, and there is no intention of making him more offensive than are half the confidants of amorous heroes. But Chaucer sees his dramatic opportunity; and without painting black in black and creat-

ing a monster of vice, he invents a good-natured and loquacious elderly go-between, full of proverbial philosophy and invaluable experience—a genuine light comedy character for all times. How admirably this Pandarus practises as well as preaches his art; using the hospitable Deiphobus and the queenly Helen as unconscious instruments in his intrigue for bringing the lovers together:—

“She came to dinner in her plain intent;
But God and Pandar wist what all this meant.”

Lastly, considering the extreme length of Chaucer's poem, and the very simple plot of the story which it tells, one cannot fail to admire the skill with which the conduct of its action is managed. In Boccaccio the earlier part of the story is treated with brevity, while the conclusion, after the catastrophe has occurred and the main interest has passed, is long drawn out. Chaucer dwells at great length upon the earlier and pleasing portion of the tale, more especially on the falling in love of Cressid, which is worked out with admirable naturalness. But he comparatively hastens over its pitiable end—the fifth and last book of his poem corresponding to not less than four cantos of the *Filostrato*. In Chaucer's hands, therefore, the story is a real love-story; and the more that we are led to rejoice with the lovers in their bliss, the more our compassion is excited by the lamentable end of so much happiness; and we feel at one with the poet, who, after lingering over the happiness of which he has in the end to narrate the fall, as it were, unwillingly proceeds to accomplish his task, and bids his readers be wroth with the destiny of his heroine rather than with himself. His own heart, he says, bleeds and his pen quakes to write what must be written of the falsehood of Cressid, which was her doom.

Chaucer's nature, however tried, was unmistakeably one gifted with the blessed power of easy self-recovery. Though it was in a melancholy vein that he had begun to write *Troilus and Cressid*, he had found opportunities enough in the course of the poem for giving expression to the fresh vivacity and playful humour which are justly reckoned among his chief characteristics. And thus, towards its close, we are not surprised to find him apparently looking forward to a sustained effort of a kind more congenial to himself. He sends forth his "little book, his little tragedy," with the prayer that, before he dies, God, his Maker, may send him might to "make some comedy." If the poem called the *House of Fame* followed upon *Troilus and Cressid* (the order of succession may, however, have been the reverse), then, although the poet's own mood had little altered, yet he had resolved upon essaying a direction which he rightly felt to be suitable to his genius.

The *House of Fame* has not been distinctly traced to any one foreign source; but the influence of both Petrarch and Dante, as well as that of classical authors, are clearly to be traced in the poem. And yet this work, Chaucer's most ambitious attempt in poetical allegory, may be described not only as in the main due to an original conception, but as representing the results of the writer's personal experience. All things considered, it is the production of a man of wonderful reading, and shows that Chaucer's was a mind interested in the widest variety of subjects, which drew no invidious distinctions, such as we moderns are prone to insist upon, between Arts and Science, but (notwithstanding an occasional deprecatory modesty) eagerly sought to familiarise itself with the achievements of both. In a passage concerning the men of let-

ters who had found a place in the *House of Fame*, he displays not only an acquaintance with the names of several ancient classics, but also a keen appreciation—now and then, perhaps, due to instinct—of their several characteristics. Elsewhere he shows his interest in scientific inquiry by references to such matters as the theory of sound and the Arabic system of numeration; while the Mentor of the poem, the Eagle, openly boasts his powers of clear scientific demonstration, in averring that he can speak “lewdly” (*i. e.*, popularly) “to a lewd man.” The poem opens with a very fresh and lively discussion of the question of dreams in general—a semi-scientific subject which much occupied Chaucer, and upon which even Pandarus and the wedded couple of the *Nun’s Priest’s Tale* expend their philosophy.

Thus, besides giving evidence of considerable information and study, the *House of Fame* shows Chaucer to have been gifted with much natural humour. Among its happy touches are the various rewards bestowed by Fame upon the claimants for her favour, including the ready grant of evil fame to those who desire it (a bad name, to speak colloquially, is to be had for the asking); and the wonderful paucity of those who wish their good works to remain in obscurity and to be their own reward, but then Chaucer was writing in the Middle Ages. And as, pointing in a direction which the author of the poem was subsequently to follow out, we may also specially notice the company thronging the House of Rumour: shipmen and pilgrims, the two most numerous kinds of travellers in Chaucer’s age, fresh from seaport and sepulchre, with scrips brimful of unauthenticated intelligence. In short, this poem offers in its details much that is characteristic of its author’s genius; while, as a whole, its abrupt termina-

tion notwithstanding, it leaves the impression of completeness. The allegory, simple and clear in construction, fulfils the purpose for which it was devised; the conceptions upon which it is based are neither idle, like many of those in Chaucer's previous allegories, nor are they so artificial and far-fetched as to fatigue instead of stimulating the mind. Pope, who reproduced parts of the *House of Fame* in a loose paraphrase, in attempting to improve the construction of Chaucer's work, only mutilated it. As it stands, it is clear and digestible; and how many allegories, one may take leave to ask, in our own allegory-loving literature or in any other, merit the same commendation? For the rest, Pope's own immortal *Dunciad*, though doubtless more immediately suggested by a personal satire of Dryden's, is in one sense a kind of travesty of the *House of Fame*—a *House of Infamy*.

In the theme of this poem there was undoubtedly something that could hardly fail to humour the half-melancholy mood in which it was manifestly written. Are not, the poet could not but ask himself, all things vanity—"as men say, what may ever last?" Yet the subject brought its consolation likewise. Patient labour, such as this poem attests, is the surest road to that enduring fame, which is "conserved with the shade;" and awaking from his vision, Chaucer takes leave of the reader with a resolution already habitual to him—to read more and more, instead of resting satisfied with the knowledge he has already acquired. And in the last of the longer poems which seem assignable to this period of his life, he proves that one Latin poet at least—Venus' clerk, whom in the *House of Fame* he beheld standing on a pillar of her own Cyprian metal—had been read as well as celebrated by him.

Of this poem, the fragmentary *Legend of Good Women*,

the *Prologue* possesses a peculiar biographical as well as literary interest. In his personal feelings on the subject of love and marriage, Chaucer had, when he wrote this *Prologue*, evidently almost passed even beyond the sarcastic stage. And as a poet he was now clearly conscious of being no longer a beginner, no longer a learner only, but one whom his age knew, and in whom it took a critical interest. The list including most of his undoubted works, which he here recites, shows of itself that those already spoken of in the foregoing pages were by this time known to the world, together with two of the *Canterbury Tales*, which had either been put forth independently, or (as seems much less probable) had formed the first instalment of his great work. A further proof of the relatively late date of this *Prologue* occurs in the contingent offer which it makes of the poem to "the Queen," who can be no other than Richard II.'s young consort Anne. At the very outset we find Chaucer, as it were, reviewing his own literary position—and doing so in the spirit of an author who knows very well what is said against him, who knows very well what there is in what is said against him, and who yet is full of that true self-consciousness which holds to its course—not recklessly and ruthlessly, not with a contempt for the feelings and judgments of his fellow-creatures, but with a serene trust in the justification ensured to every honest endeavour. The principal theme of his poems had hitherto been the passion of love, and woman, who is the object of the love of man. Had he not, the superfine critics of his day may have asked—steeped as they were in the artificiality and florid extravagance of chivalry in the days of its decline, and habituated to mistranslating earthly passion into the phraseology of religious devotion—had he not debased

the passion of love, and defamed its object? Had he not begun by translating the wicked satire of Jean de Meung, "a heresy against the law" of Love? and had he not, by cynically painting in his *Cressid* a picture of woman's perfidy, encouraged men to be less faithful to women

"That be as true as ever was any steel?"

In Chaucer's way of meeting this charge, which he emphasises by putting it in the mouth of the God of Love himself, it is, to be sure, difficult to recognise any very deeply penitent spirit. He mildly wards off the reproach, sheltering himself behind his defender, the "lady in green," who afterwards proves to be herself that type of womanly and wifely fidelity unto death, the true and brave Alcestis. And even in the body of the poem one is struck by a certain perfunctoriness, not to say flippancy, in the way in which its moral is reproduced. The wrathful invective against the various classical followers of Lamech, the maker of tents,¹ wears no aspect of deep moral indignation; and it is not precisely the voice of a repentant sin-

¹ Lamech, Chaucer tells us in *Queen Annelida and the false Arcite*, was the

"First father that began
The love of two, and was in bigamy."

This poem seems designed to illustrate much the same moral as that enforced by the *Legend of Good Women*—a moral which, by-the-by, is already foreshadowed towards the close of *Troilus and Cressid*, where Chaucer speaks of

"Women that betrayèd be
Through falsë folk (God give them sorrow, amen!),
That with their greatë wit and subtlety
Betray you; and 'tis this that moveth me
To speak; and, in effect, you all I pray:
Beware of men, and hearken what I say."

ner which concludes the pathetic story of the betrayal of Phillis with the adjuration to ladies in general:—

“Beware ye women of your subtle foe,
Since yet this day men may example see;
And as in love trust ye no man but me.”

At the same time the poet lends an attentive ear, as genius can always afford to do, to a criticism of his shortcomings, and readily accepts the sentence pronounced by Alcestis, that he shall write a legend of *good* women, both maidens and also wives, that were

“True in loving all their lives.”

And thus, with the courage of a good or, at all events, easy conscience, he sets about his task which unfortunately—it is conjectured by reason of domestic calamities, probably including the death of his wife—remained, or at least has come down to us unfinished. We have only nine of the nineteen stories which he appears to have intended to present (though, indeed, a manuscript of Henry IV.’s reign quotes Chaucer’s book of “xxv good women”). It is by no means necessary to suppose that all these nine stories were written continuously; maybe, too, Chaucer, with all his virtuous intentions, grew tired of his rather monotonous scheme at a time when he was beginning to busy himself with stories meant to be fitted into the more liberal framework of the *Canterbury Tales*. All these illustrations of female constancy are of classical origin, as Chaucer is glad to make known; and most of them are taken from Ovid. But though the thread of the English poet’s narratives is supplied by such established favourites as the stories of Cleopatra, the Martyr Queen of Egypt; of Thisbe of Babylon, the Martyr; and of Dido, to whom

"Æneas was forsworn," yet he by no means slavishly adheres to his authorities, but alters or omits in accordance with the design of his book. Thus, for instance, we read of Medea's desertion by Jason, but hear nothing of her as the murderess of her children; while, on the other hand, the tragedy of Dido is enhanced by pathetic additions not to be found in Virgil. Modern taste may dislike the way in which this poem mixes up the terms and ideas of Christian martyrology with classical myths, and as "the Legend of the Saints of Cupid" assumes the character of a kind of calendar of women canonised by reason of their faithfulness to earthly love. But obviously this is a method of treatment belonging to an age, not to a single poem or poet. Chaucer's artistic judgment in the selection and arrangement of his themes, the wonderful vivacity and true pathos with which he turns upon Tarquin or Jason as if they had personally offended him, and his genuine flow of feeling not only *for* but *with* his unhappy heroines, add a new charm to the old familiar faces. Proof is thus furnished, if any proof were needed, that no story interesting in itself is too old to admit of being told again by a poet; in Chaucer's version Ovid loses something in polish, but nothing in pathos; and the breezy freshness of nature seems to be blowing through tales which became the delight of a nation's, as they have been that of many a man's, youth.

A single passage must suffice to illustrate the style of the *Legend of Good Women*; and it shall be the lament of Ariadne, the concluding passage of the story which is the typical tale of desertion, though not, as it remains in Chaucer, of desertion unconsolated. It will be seen how far the English poet's vivacity is from being extinguished by the pathos of the situation described by him.

"Right in the dawëning awaketh she,
 And gropeth in the bed, and found right nought.
 'Alas,' quoth she, 'that ever I was wrought!
 I am betrayèd!' and her hair she rent,
 And to the strandë barefoot fast she went,
 And criedë: 'Theseus, mine heartë sweet!
 Where be ye, that I may not with you meet?
 And mightë thus by beastës been y-slain!
 The hollow rockës answered her again.
 No man she sawë; and yet shone the moon,
 And high upon a rock she wentë soon,
 And saw his bargë sailing in the sea.
 Cold waxed her heart, and right thus saidë she:
 'Meeker than ye I find the beastës wild!
 (Hath he not sin that he her thus beguiled?)
 She cried, 'O turn again for ruth and sin,
 Thy bargë hath not all thy meinie in.'
 Her kerchief on a polë stickèd she,
 Askancë, that he should it well y-see,
 And should remember that she was behind,
 And turn again, and on the strand her find.
 But all for naught; his way he is y-gone,
 And down she fell aswoonë on a stone;
 And up she rose, and kissed, in all her care,
 The steppës of his feet remaining there;
 And then unto her bed she speaketh so:
 'Thou bed,' quoth she, 'that hast received two,
 Thou shalt answer for two, and not for one;
 Where is the greater part away y-gone?
 Alas, what shall I wretched wight become?
 For though so be no help shall hither come,
 Home to my cuntry dare I not for dread,
 I can myselfë in this case not rede.'
 Why should I tell more of her cõplaining?
 It is so long it were a heavy thing.
 In her Epistle Naso telleth all.
 But shortly to the endë tell I shall.
 The goddës have her holpen for pity,
 And in the sign of Taurus men may see

The stonës of her crown all shining clear.
I will no further speak of this mattér.
But thus these falsë lovers can beguile
Their truë love; the devil quite him his while!"

Manifestly, then, in this period of his life—if a chronology which is in a great measure conjectural may be accepted—Chaucer had been a busy worker, and his pen had covered many a page with the results of his rapid productivity. Perhaps his *Words unto his own Scrivener*, which we may fairly date about this time, were rather too hard on "Adam." Authors are often hard on persons who have to read their handiwork professionally; but, in the interest of posterity, poets may be permitted an execration or two against whosoever changes their words as well as against whosoever moves their bones:—

"Adam Scrivener, if ever it thee befall
Boece or *Troilus* to write anew,
Under thy long locks may'st thou have the scall,
If thou my writing copy not more true!
So oft a day I must thy work renew,
It to correct and eke to rub and scrape;
And all is through thy negligence and rape."

How far the manuscript of the *Canterbury Tales* had already progressed is uncertain; the *Prologue* to the *Legend of Good Women* mentions the *Love of Palamon and Arcite*—an earlier version of the *Knight's Tale*, if not identical with it—and a *Life of Saint Cecilia* which is preserved, apparently without alteration, in the *Second Nun's Tale*. Possibly other stories had been already added to these, and the *Prologue* written—but this is more than can be asserted with safety. Who shall say whether, if the stream of prosperity had continued to flow, on which the bark of Chaucer's fortunes had for some years

been borne along, he might not have found leisure and impulse sufficient for completing his masterpiece, or, at all events, for advancing it near to completion? That his powers declined with his years, is a conjecture which it would be difficult to support by satisfactory evidence; though it seems natural enough to assume that he wrote the best of his *Canterbury Tales* in his best days. Troubled times we know to have been in store for him. The reverse in his fortunes may perhaps fail to call forth in us the sympathy which we feel for Milton in his old age doing battle against a Philistine reaction, or for Spenser, overwhelmed with calamities at the end of a life full of bitter disappointment. But at least we may look upon it with the respectful pity which we entertain for Ben Jonson groaning in the midst of his literary honours under that *dura rerum necessitas*, which is rarely more a matter of indifference to poets than it is to other men.

In 1386, as already noted, Chaucer, while continuing to hold both his offices at the Customs, had taken his seat in Parliament as one of the knights of the shire of Kent. He had attained to this honour during the absence in Spain of his patron, the Duke of Lancaster, though probably he had been elected in the interest of that prince. But John of Gaunt's influence was inevitably reduced to nothing during his absence, and no doubt King Richard now hoped to be a free agent. But he very speedily found that the hand of his younger uncle, Thomas, Duke of Gloucester, was heavier upon him than that of the elder. The Parliament of which Chaucer was a member was the assembly which boldly confronted the autocratical tendencies of Richard II., and after overthrowing the Chancellor, Michael de la Pole, Earl of Suffolk, forced upon the

King a Council controlling the administration of affairs. Concerning the acts of this Council, of which Gloucester was the leading member, little or nothing is known, except that in financial matters it attempted, after the manner of new brooms, to sweep clean. Soon the attention of Gloucester and his following was occupied by subjects more absorbing than a branch of reform fated to be treated fitfully. In this instance the new administration had as usual demanded its victims—and among their number was Chaucer; for it can hardly be a mere coincidence that by the beginning of December in this year, 1386, Chaucer had lost one, and by the middle of the same month the other, of his comptrollerships. At the same time, it would be presumptuously unfair to conclude that misconduct of any kind on his part had been the reason of his removal. The explanation usually given is that he fell as an adherent of John of Gaunt: perhaps a safer way of putting the matter would be to say that John of Gaunt was no longer in England to protect him. Inasmuch as even reforming Governments are occasionally as anxious about men as they are about measures, Chaucer's posts may have been wanted for nominees of the Duke of Gloucester and his Council—such as it is probably no injustice to Masters Adam Yerdely and Henry Gisors (who respectively succeeded Chaucer in his two offices) to suppose them to have been. Moreover, it is just possible that Chaucer was the reverse of a *persona grata* to Gloucester's faction on account of the Comptroller's previous official connexion with Sir Nicholas Brembre, who, besides being hated in the city, had been accused of seeking to compass the deaths of the Duke and of some of his adherents. In any case, it is noticeable that four months *before* the return to England of the Duke of Lancaster—i. e., in July, 1389—Chaucer was appointed

Clerk of the King's Works at Westminster, the Tower, and a large number of other royal manors or tenements, including (from 1390, at all events) St. George's Chapel, Windsor. In this office he was not ill-paid, receiving two shillings a day in money, and very possibly perquisites in addition, besides being allowed to appoint a deputy. Inasmuch as, in the summer of the year 1389, King Richard had assumed the reins of government in person, while the ascendancy of Gloucester was drawing to a close, we may conclude the King to have been personally desirous to provide for a faithful and attached servant of his house, for whom he had had reason to feel a personal liking. It would be specially pleasing, were we able to connect with Chaucer's restoration to official employment the high-minded Queen Anne, whose impending betrothal he had probably celebrated in one poem, and whose patronage he had claimed for another.

The Clerkship of the King's Works, to which Chaucer was appointed, seems to have been but a temporary office; or at all events he only held it for rather less than two years, during part of which he performed its duties by deputy. Already, however, before his appointment to this post, he had certainly become involved in difficulties; for in May, 1388, we find his pensions, at his own request, assigned to another person (John Scalby)—a statement implying that he had raised money on them which he could only pay by making over the pensions themselves. Very possibly, too, he had, before his dismissal from his comptrollerships, been subjected to an enquiry which, if it did not touch his honour, at all events gave rise to very natural apprehensions on the part of himself and his friends. There is, accordingly, much probability in the conjecture which ascribes to this season of peril and pressure the

composition of the following justly famous stanzas, entitled
Good Counsel of Chaucer :—

"Flee from the press, and dwell with soothfastness;
 Sufficē thee thy good, though it be small;
 For hoard hath hate, and climbing tickleness:
 Press hath envy, and wealth is blinded all.
 Savour no more than thee behovē shall;
 Do well thyself that other folk canst rede;
 And truth thee shall deliver, it is no dread.

"Painē thee not each crooked to redress
 In trust of her¹ that turneth as a ball.
 Greatē rest stands in little business.
 Beware also to spurn against a nail.
 Strive not as doth a pitcher with a wall.
 Deemē thyself that deemest others' deed;
 And truth thee shall deliver, it is no dread.

"That thee is sent receive in buxorness;
 The wrestling of this world asketh a fall.
 Here is no home, here is but wilderness.
 Forth, pilgrimē! forth, beast, out of thy stall!
 Look up on high, and thankē God of all.
 Waivē thy lust, and let thy ghost thee lead,
 And truth shall thee deliver, it is no dread."

Misfortunes, it is said, never come alone; and whatever view may be taken as to the nature of the relations between Chaucer and his wife, her death cannot have left him untouched. From the absence of any record as to the payment of her pension after June, 1387, this event is presumed to have taken place in the latter half of that year. More than this cannot safely be conjectured; but it remains *possible* that the *Legend of Good Women* and its *Prologue* formed a peace-offering to one whom Chaucer may have loved again after he had lost her, though

¹ Fortune.

without thinking of her as of his "late departed saint." Philippa Chaucer had left behind her a son of the name of Lewis; and it is pleasing to find the widower in the year 1391 (the year in which he lost his Clerkship of the Works) attending to the boy's education, and supplying him with the intellectual "bread and milk" suitable for his tender age in the shape of a popular treatise on a subject which has at all times excited the intelligent curiosity of the young. The treatise *On the Astrolabe*, after describing the instrument itself, and showing how to work it, proceeded, or was intended to proceed, to fulfil the purposes of a general astronomical manual; but, like other and more important works of its author, it has come down to us in an uncompleted, or at all events incomplete, condition. What there is of it was, as a matter of course, not original—popular scientific books rarely are. The little treatise, however, possesses a double interest for the student of Chaucer. In the first place, it shows explicitly, what several passages imply, that while he was to a certain extent fond of astronomical study (as to his capacity for which he clearly does injustice to himself in the *House of Fame*), his good sense and his piety alike revolted against extravagant astrological speculations. He certainly does not wish to go as far as the honest carpenter in the *Miller's Tale*, who glories in his incredulity of aught besides his *credo*, and who yet is afterwards befooled by the very impostor of whose astrological pursuits he had reprehended the impiety. "Men," he says, "should know nothing of that which is private to God. Yea, blessed be alway a simple man who knows nothing but only his belief." In his little work *On the Astrolabe* Chaucer speaks with calm reasonableness of superstitions in which his spirit has no faith, and pleads guilty to ignorance of the useless knowl-

edge with which they are surrounded. But the other, and perhaps the chief value, to us of this treatise lies in the fact that of Chaucer in an intimate personal relation it contains the only picture in which it is impossible to suspect any false or exaggerated colouring. For here we have him writing to his "little Lewis" with fatherly satisfaction in the ability displayed by the boy "to learn sciences touching numbers and proportions," and telling how, after making a present to the child of "a sufficient astrolabe as for our own horizon, composed after the latitude of Oxford," he has further resolved to explain to him a certain number of conclusions connected with the purposes of the instrument. This he has made up his mind to do in a forcible as well as simple way; for he has shrewdly divined a secret, now and then overlooked by those who condense sciences for babes, that children need to be taught a few things not only clearly but fully—repetition being in more senses than one "the mother of studies:"—

"Now will I pray meekly every discreet person that readeth or heareth this little treatise, to hold my rude inditing excused, and my superfluity of words, for two causes. The first cause is: that curious inditing and hard sentences are full heavy at once for such a child to learn. And the second cause is this: that truly it seems better to me to write unto a child twice a good sentence than to forget it once."

Unluckily we know nothing further of Lewis—not even whether, as has been surmised, he died before he had been able to turn to lucrative account his calculating powers, after the fashion of his apocryphal brother Thomas or otherwise.

Though by the latter part of the year 1391 Chaucer had lost his Clerkship of the Works, certain payments (possibly of arrears) seem afterwards to have been made to him in

connexion with the office. A very disagreeable incident of his tenure of it had been a double robbery from his person of official money, to the very serious extent of twenty pounds. The perpetrators of the crime were a notorious gang of highwaymen, by whom Chaucer was, in September, 1390, apparently on the same day, beset both at Westminster and near to "the foul Oak" at Hatcham, in Surrey. A few months afterwards he was discharged by writ from repayment of the loss to the Crown. His experiences during the three years following are unknown; but in 1394 (when things were fairly quiet in England) he was granted an annual pension of twenty pounds by the King. This pension, of which several subsequent notices occur, seems at times to have been paid tardily or in small instalments, and also to have been frequently anticipated by Chaucer in the shape of loans of small sums. Further evidence of his straits is to be found in his having, in the year 1398, obtained letters of protection against arrest, making him safe for two years. The grant of a tun of wine in October of the same year is the last favour known to have been extended to Chaucer by King Richard II. Probably no English sovereign has been more diversely estimated, both by his contemporaries and by posterity, than this ill-fated prince, in the records of whose career many passages betokening high spirit strangely contrast with the impotence of its close. It will at least be remembered in his favour that he was a patron of the arts; and that after Froissart had been present at his christening, he received, when on the threshold of manhood, the homage of Gower, and on the eve of his downfall showed most seasonable kindness to a poet far greater than either of these. It seems scarcely justifiable to assign to any particular point of time the *Ballade sent to*

King Richard by Chaucer; but its manifest intention was to apprise the King of the poet's sympathy with his struggle against the opponents of the royal policy, which was a thoroughly autocratical one. Considering the nature of the relations between the pair, nothing could be more unlikely than that Chaucer should have taken upon himself to exhort his sovereign and patron to steadfastness of political conduct. And in truth, though the loyal tone of this address is (as already observed) unmistakeable enough, there is little difficulty in accounting for the mixture of commonplace reflexions and of admonitions to the King, to persist in a spirited domestic policy. He is to

"Dread God, do law, love truth and worthiness,"

and wed his people—not himself—"again to steadfastness." However, even a quasi-political poem of this description, whatever element of implied flattery it may contain, offers pleasanter reading than those least attractive of all occasional poems, of which the burden is a cry for money. The *Envoy to Scogan* has been diversely dated and diversely interpreted. The reference in these lines to a deluge of pestilence clearly means, not a pestilence produced by heavy rains, but heavy rains which might be expected to produce a pestilence. The primary purpose of the epistle admits of no doubt, though it is only revealed in the postscript. After bantering his friend on account of his faint-heartedness in love—

"Because thy lady saw not thy distress,
Therefore thou gavest her up at Michaelmas—"

Chaucer ends by entreating him to further his claims upon the royal munificence. Of this friend, Henry Scogan, a tradition repeated by Ben Jonson averred that he was a

fine gentleman and Master of Arts of Henry IV.'s time, who was regarded and rewarded for his Court "disguisings" and "writings in ballad-royal." He is, therefore, appropriately apostrophised by Chaucer as kneeling

"... At the streamës head
Of grace, of all honoûr and worthiness,"

and reminded that his friend is at the other end of the current. The weariness of tone, natural under the circumstances, obscures whatever humour the poem possesses.

Very possibly the lines to Scogan were written not before, but immediately after, the accession of Henry IV. In that case they belong to about the same date as the well-known and very plain-spoken *Complaint of Chaucer to his Purse*, addressed by him to the new Sovereign without loss of time, if not indeed, as it would be hardly uncharitable to suppose, prepared beforehand. Even in this *Complaint* (the term was a technical one for an elegiac piece, and was so used by Spenser) there is a certain frank geniality of tone, the natural accompaniment of an easy conscience, which goes some way to redeem the nature of the subject. Still, the theme remains one which only an exceptionally skilful treatment can make sufficiently pathetic or perfectly comic. The lines had the desired effect; for within four days after his accession — *i. e.*, on October 3rd, 1399 — the "conqueror of Brut's Albion," otherwise King Henry IV., doubled Chaucer's pension of twenty marks, so that, continuing as he did to enjoy the annuity of twenty pounds granted him by King Richard, he was now once more in comfortable circumstances. The best proof of these lies in the fact that very speedily — on Christmas Eve, 1399 — Chaucer, probably in a rather sanguine mood, covenanted for the lease for fifty-three

years of a house in the garden of the chapel of St. Mary at Westminster. And here, in comfort and in peace, as there seems every reason to believe, he died before another year, and with it the century, had quite run out—on October 25th, 1400.

Our fancy may readily picture to itself the last days of Geoffrey Chaucer, and the ray of autumn sunshine which gilded his reverend head before it was bowed in death. His old patron's more fortunate son, whose earlier chivalrous days we are apt to overlook in thinking of him as a politic king and the sagacious founder of a dynasty, cannot have been indifferent to the welfare of a subject for whose needs he had provided with so prompt a liberality. In the vicinity of a throne the smiles of royalty are wont to be contagious—and probably many a courtier thought well to seek the company of one who, so far as we know, had never forfeited the good-will of any patron or the attachment of any friend. We may, too, imagine him visited by associates who loved and honoured the poet as well as the man—by Gower, blind, or nearly so, if tradition speak the truth, and who, having "long had sickness upon hand," seems, unlike Chaucer, to have been ministered to in his old age by a housewife whom he had taken to himself in contradiction of principles preached by both the poets; and by "Bukton," converted, perchance, by means of Chaucer's gift to him of the *Wife of Bath's Tale*, to a resolution of perpetual bachelorhood, but otherwise, as Mr. Carlyle would say, "dim to us." Besides these, if he was still among the living, the philosophical Strode in his Dominican habit, on a visit to London from one of his monasteries; or—more probably—the youthful Lydgate, not yet a Benedictine monk, but pausing, on his return from his travels in divers lands, to sit awhile, as it were, at the feet

of the master in whose poetic example he took pride; the courtly Scogan; and Occleve, already learned, who was to cherish the memory of Chaucer's outward features as well as of his fruitful intellect: all these may in his closing days have gathered around their friend; and perhaps one or the other may have been present to close the watchful eyes for ever.

But there was yet another company with which, in these last years, and perhaps in these last days of his life, Chaucer had intercourse, of which he can rarely have lost sight, and which even in solitude he must have had constantly with him. This company has since been well known to generations and centuries of Englishmen. Its members head that goodly procession of figures which have been familiar to our fathers as live-long friends, which are the same to us, and will be to our children after us—the procession of the nation's favourites among the characters created by our great dramatists and novelists, the eternal types of human nature which nothing can efface from our imagination. Or is there less reality about the *Knight* in his short cassock and old-fashioned armour and the *Wife of Bath* in hat and wimple, than—for instance—about Uncle Toby and the Widow Wadman? Can we not hear *Madame Eglantine* lisping her “Stratford-atte-Bowe” French as if she were a personage in a comedy by Congreve or Sheridan? Is not the *Summoner*, with his “fire-red cherubim’s face,” a worthy companion, for Lieutenant Bardolph himself? And have not the humble *Parson* and his Brother the *Ploughman* that irresistible pathos which Dickens could find in the simple and the poor? All these figures, with those of their fellow-pilgrims, are to us living men and women; and in their midst the poet who created them lives, as he has painted

himself among the company, not less faithfully than Occleve depicted him from memory after death.

How long Chaucer had been engaged upon the *Canterbury Tales* it is impossible to decide. No process is more hazardous than that of distributing a poet's works among the several periods of his life according to divisions of species—placing his tragedies or serious stories in one season, his comedies or lighter tales in another, and so forth. Chaucer no more admits of such treatment than Shakespeare; nor, because there happens to be in his case little actual evidence by which to control or contradict it, are we justified in subjecting him to it. All we know is that he left his great work a fragment, and that we have no mention in any of his other poems of more than three of the *Tales*—two, as already noticed, being mentioned in the Prologue to the Legend of Good Women, written at a time when they had perhaps not yet assumed the form in which they are preserved, while to the third (the *Wife of Bath*) reference is made in the *Envoi to Bukton*, the date of which is quite uncertain. At the same time, the labour which was expended upon the *Canterbury Tales* by their author manifestly obliges us to conclude that their composition occupied several years, with inevitable interruptions; while the gaiety and brightness of many of the stories, and the exuberant humour and exquisite pathos of others, as well as the masterly effectiveness of the *Prologue*, make it almost certain that these parts of the work were written when Chaucer was not only capable of doing his best, but also in a situation which admitted of his doing it. The supposition is, therefore, a very probable one, that the main period of their composition may have extended over the last eleven or twelve years of his life, and have begun about the time when he was again placed above

want by his appointment to the Clerkship of the Royal Works.

Again, it is virtually certain that the poem of the *Canterbury Tales* was left in an unfinished and partially unconnected condition, and it is altogether uncertain whether Chaucer had finally determined upon maintaining or modifying the scheme originally indicated by him in the *Prologue*. There can, accordingly, be no necessity for working out a scheme into which everything that he has left belonging to the *Canterbury Tales* may most easily and appropriately fit. Yet the labour is by no means lost of such inquiries as those which have, with singular zeal, been prosecuted concerning the several problems that have to be solved before such a scheme can be completed. Without a review of the evidence it would, however, be preposterous to pronounce on the proper answer to be given to the questions: what were the number of tales and that of tellers ultimately designed by Chaucer; what was the order in which he intended the *Tales* actually written by him to stand; and what was the plan of the journey of his pilgrims, as to the localities of its stages and as to the time occupied by it—whether one day for the fifty-six miles from London to Canterbury (which is by no means impossible), or two days (which seems more likely), or four. The route of the pilgrimage must have been one in parts of which it is pleasant even now to dally, when the sweet spring flowers are in bloom which Mr. Boughton has painted for lovers of the poetry of English landscape.

There are one or two other points which should not be overlooked in considering the *Canterbury Tales* as a whole. It has sometimes been assumed as a matter of course that the plan of the work was borrowed from Boccaccio. If this means that Chaucer owed to the *Decam-*

erone the idea of including a number of stories in the framework of a single narrative, it implies too much. For this notion, a familiar one in the East, had long been known to Western Europe by the numerous versions of the terribly ingenious story of the *Seven Wise Masters* (in the progress of which the unexpected never happens), as well as by similar collections of the same kind. And the special connexion of this device with a company of pilgrims might, as has been well remarked, have been suggested to Chaucer by an English book certainly within his ken, the *Vision concerning Piers Plowman*, where, in the "fair field full of folk," are assembled, among others, "pilgrims and palmers who went forth on their way" to St. James of Compostella and to saints at Rome "*with many wise tales*"—"and had leave to lie all their life after"). But even had Chaucer owed the idea of his plan to Boccaccio, he would not thereby have incurred a heavy debt to the Italian novelist. There is nothing really dramatic in the schemes of the *Decamerone*, or of the numerous imitations which it called forth, from the French *Heptaméron* and the Neapolitan *Pentamerone* down to the German *Phantasmus*. It is unnecessary to come nearer to our own times; for the author of the *Earthly Paradise* follows Chaucer in endeavouring at least to give a framework of real action to his collection of poetic tales. There is no organic connexion between the powerful narrative of the Plague opening Boccaccio's book, and the stories, chiefly of love and its adventures, which follow; all that Boccaccio did was to preface an interesting series of tales by a more interesting chapter of history, and then to bind the tales themselves together lightly and naturally in days, like rows of pearls in a collar. But while in the *Decamerone* the framework, in its relation to the stories, is of lit-

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tle or no significance, in the *Canterbury Tales* it forms one of the most valuable organic elements in the whole work. One test of the distinction is this: what reader of the *Decamerone* connects any of the novels composing it with the personality of the particular narrator, or even cares to remember the grouping of the stories as illustrations of fortunate or unfortunate, adventurous or illicit, passion? The charm of Boccaccio's book, apart from the independent merits of the Introduction, lies in the admirable skill and unflagging vivacity with which the "novels" themselves are told. The scheme of the *Canterbury Tales*, on the other hand, possesses some genuinely dramatic elements. If the entire form, at all events in its extant condition, can scarcely be said to have a plot, it at least has an *exposition* unsurpassed by that of any comedy, ancient or modern; it has the possibility of a growth of action and interest; and, which is of far more importance, it has a variety of characters which mutually both relieve and supplement one another. With how sure an instinct, by the way, Chaucer has anticipated that unwritten law of the modern drama according to which low comedy characters always appear in couples! Thus the *Miller* and the *Reeve* are a noble pair running in parallel lines, though in contrary directions; so are the *Cook* and the *Manciple*, and again and more especially the *Friar* and the *Summoner*. Thus at least the germ of a comedy exists in the plan of the *Canterbury Tales*. No comedy could be formed out of the mere circumstance of a company of ladies and gentlemen sitting down in a country-house to tell an unlimited number of stories on a succession of topics; but a comedy could be written with the purpose of showing how a wide variety of national types will present themselves, when brought into mutual contact by an occasion

peculiarly fitted to call forth their individual rather than their common characteristics.

For not only are we at the opening of the *Canterbury Tales* placed in the very heart and centre of English life; but the poet contrives to find for what may be called his action a background, which seems of itself to suggest the most serious emotions and the most humorous associations. And this without anything grotesque in the collocation, such as is involved in the notion of men telling anecdotes at a funeral, or forgetting a pestilence over love-stories. Chaucer's *dramatis personæ* are a company of pilgrims, whom at first we find assembled in a hostelry in Southwark, and whom we afterwards accompany on their journey to Canterbury. The hostelry is that *Tabard* inn which, though it changed its name, and no doubt much of its actual structure, long remained, both in its general appearance, and perhaps in part of its actual self, a genuine relic of mediæval London. There, till within a very few years from the present date, might still be had a draught of that London ale of which Chaucer's *Cook* was so thorough a *connoisseur*; and there within the big courtyard, surrounded by a gallery very probably a copy of its predecessor, was ample room for

"... Well nine and twenty in a company
Of sundry folk,"

with their horses and travelling gear sufficient for a ride to Canterbury. The goal of this ride has its religious, its national, one might even say its political aspect; but the journey itself has an importance of its own. A journey is generally one of the best of opportunities for bringing out the distinctive points in the characters of travellers; and we are accustomed to say that no two men can long

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travel in one another's company unless their friendship is equal to the severest of tests. At home men live mostly among colleagues and comrades; on a journey they are placed in continual contrast with men of different pursuits and different habits of life. The shipman away from his ship, the monk away from his cloister, the scholar away from his books, become interesting instead of remaining commonplace, because the contrasts become marked which exist between them. Moreover, men undertake journeys for divers purposes, and a pilgrimage in Chaucer's day united a motley group of chance companions in search of different ends at the same goal. One goes to pray, the other seeks profit; the third distraction, the fourth pleasure. To some the road is everything; to others, its terminus. All this vanity lay in the mere choice of Chaucer's framework; there was, accordingly, something of genius in the thought itself; and even an inferior workmanship could hardly have left a description of a Canterbury pilgrimage unproductive of a wide variety of dramatic effects.

But Chaucer's workmanship was as admirable as his selection of his framework was felicitous. He has executed only part of his scheme, according to which each pilgrim was to tell two tales both going and coming, and the best narrator, the laureate of this merry company, was to be rewarded by a supper at the common expense on their return to their starting-place. Thus the design was, not merely to string together a number of poetical tales by an easy thread, but to give a real unity and completeness to the whole poem. All the tales told by all the pilgrims were to be connected together by links; the reader was to take an interest in the movement and progress of the journey to and fro; and the poem was

to have a middle as well as a beginning and an end—the beginning being the inimitable *Prologue* as it now stands; the middle the history of the pilgrims' doings at Canterbury; and the close their return and farewell celebration at the Tabard inn. Though Chaucer carried out only about a fourth part of this plan, yet we can see, as clearly as if the whole poem lay before us in a completed form, that its most salient feature was intended to lie in the variety of its characters.

Each of these characters is distinctly marked out in itself, while at the same time it is designed as the type of a class. This very obvious criticism, of course, most readily admits of being illustrated by the *Prologue*—a gallery of *genre*-portraits which many master-hands have essayed to reproduce with pen or with pencil. Indeed, one lover of Chaucer sought to do so with both—poor gifted Blake, whose descriptive text of his picture of the Canterbury Pilgrims Charles Lamb, with the loving exaggeration in which he was at times fond of indulging, pronounced the finest criticism on Chaucer's poem he had ever read. But it should be likewise noticed that the character of each pilgrim is kept up through the poem, both incidentally in the connecting passages between tale and tale, and in the manner in which the tales themselves are introduced and told. The connecting passages are full of dramatic vivacity; in these the *Host*, Master Harry Bailly, acts as a most efficient *choragus*; but the other pilgrims are not silent, and in the *Manciple's* Prologue the *Cook* enacts a bit of downright farce for the amusement of the company and of stray inhabitants of "Bob-up-and-down." He is, however, homœopathically cured of the effects of his drunkenness, so that the *Host* feels justified in offering up a thanksgiving to Bacchus

for his powers of conciliation. The *Mun of Law's* Prologue is an argument; the *Wife of Bath's* the ceaseless clatter of an indomitable tongue. The sturdy *Franklin* corrects himself when deviating into circumlocution:—

“Till that the brightë sun had lost his hue,
For th' hórizon had reft the sun. of light
(This is as much to say as: it was night).”

The *Miller* “tells his churlish tale in his manner,” of which manner the less said the better; while in the *Reeve's Tale*, Chaucer even, after the manner of a comic dramatist, gives his Northern undergraduate a vulgar, ungrammatical phraseology, probably designedly, since the poet was himself a “Southern man.” The *Pardoner* is exuberant in his sample-eloquence; the *Doctor of Physic* is gravely and sententiously moral—

“... A proper man,
And like a prelate, by Saint Runyan,”

says the *Host*. Most sustained of all, though he tells no tale, is, from the nature of the case, the character of Harry Bailly, the host of the Tabard, himself—who, whatever resemblance he may bear to his actual original, is the ancestor of a long line of descendants, including mine Host of the Garter in the *Merry Wives of Windsor*. He is a thorough worldling, to whom anything smack-^{ing} of the precisian in morals is as offensive as anything of a Romantic tone in literature; he smells a Lollard without fail, and turns up his nose at an old-fashioned ballad or a string of tragic instances as out of date or tedious. In short, he speaks his mind and that of other more timid people at the same time, and is one of those sinners whom everybody both likes and respects. “I advise,” says the *Par-*

doner, with polite impudence (when inviting the company to become purchasers of the holy wares which he has for sale), that

"... Our host, he shall begin,
For he is most envelopèd in sin."

He is thus both an admirable picture in himself and an admirable foil to those characters which are most unlike him—above all, to the *Parson* and the *Clerk of Oxford*, the representatives of religion and learning.

As to the *Tales* themselves, Chaucer beyond a doubt meant their style and tone to be above all things *popular*. This is one of the causes accounting for the favour shown to the work—a favour attested, so far as earlier times are concerned, by the vast number of manuscripts existing of it. The *Host* is, so to speak, charged with the constant injunction of this cardinal principle of popularity as to both theme and style. "Tell us," he coolly demands of the most learned and sedate of all his fellow-travellers,

"... Some merry thing of adventures;
Your termès, your coloûrs, and your figûres,
Keep them in store, till so be ye indite
High style, as when that men to kingès write;
Speak ye so plain at this time, we you pray,
That we may understandë that ye say."

And the *Clerk* follows the spirit of the injunction both by omitting, as impertinent, a proeme in which his original, Petrarch, gives a great deal of valuable, but not in its connexion interesting, geographical information, and by adding a facetious moral to what he calls the "unrestful metter" of his story. Even the *Squire*, though, after the manner of young men, far more than his elders addicted to the grand style, and accordingly specially praised for his

eloquence by the simple *Franklin*, prefers to reduce to its plain meaning the courtly speech of the Knight of the Brazen Steed. In connexion with what was said above, it is observable that each of the *Tales* in subject suits its narrator. Not by chance is the all-but-Quixotic romance of *Pulamon and Arcite*, taken by Chaucer from Boccaccio's *Teseide*, related by the *Knight*; not by chance does the *Clerk*, following Petrarch's Latin version of a story related by the same author, tell the even more improbable, but, in the plainness of its moral, infinitely more fructuous, tale of patient Griseldis. How well the *Second Nun* is fitted with a legend which carries us back a few centuries into the atmosphere of Hrosvitha's comedies, and suggests with the utmost verisimilitude the nature of a nun's lucubrations on the subject of marriage. It is impossible to go through the whole list of the *Tales*; but all may be truly said to be in keeping with the characters and manners (often equally indifferent) of their tellers—down to that of the *Nun's Priest*, which, brimful of humour as it is, has just the mild naughtiness about it which comes so drolly from a spiritual director in his worldlier hour.

Not a single one of these *Tales* can with any show of reason be ascribed to Chaucer's own invention. French literature—chiefly, though not solely, that of *fabliaux*—doubtless supplied the larger share of his materials; but that here also his debts to Italian literature, and to Boccaccio in particular, are considerable, seems hardly to admit of denial. But while Chaucer freely borrowed from foreign models, he had long passed beyond the stage of translating without assimilating. It would be rash to assume that where he altered he invariably improved. His was not the unerring eye which, like Shakspeare's in his dramatic transfusions of Plutarch, missed no particle of

the gold mingled with the baser metal, but rejected the dross with sovereign certainty. In dealing with Italian originals more especially, he sometimes altered for the worse, and sometimes for the better; but he was never a mere slavish translator. So in the *Knight's Tale* he may be held in some points to have deviated disadvantageously from his original; but, on the other hand, in the *Clerk's Tale* he inserts a passage on the fidelity of women, and another on the instability of the multitude, besides adding a touch of nature irresistibly pathetic in the exclamation of the faithful wife, tried beyond her power of concealing the emotion within her:

"O gracious God! how gentle and how kind
Ye seemèd by your speech and your viságe
The day that makèd was our marriage."

So also in the *Man of Law's Tale*, which is taken from the French, he increases the vivacity of the narrative by a considerable number of apostrophes in his own favourite manner, besides pleasing the general reader by divers general reflexions of his own inditing. Almost necessarily, the literary form and the self-consistency of his originals lose under such treatment. But his dramatic sense, on which, perhaps, his commentators have not always sufficiently dwelt, is rarely, if ever, at fault. Two illustrations of this gift in Chaucer must suffice, which shall be chosen in two quarters where he has worked with materials of the most widely different kind. Many readers must have compared with Dante's original (in canto xxxiii. of the *Inferno*) Chaucer's version in the *Monk's Tale* of the story of Ugolino. Chaucer, while he necessarily omits the ghastly introduction, expands the pathetic picture of the sufferings of the father and his sons in their dungeon, and closes, far

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more briefly and effectively than Dante, with a touch of the most refined pathos:—

“DE HUGILINO COMITE PISÆ.

“Of Hugolin of Pisa the languor
There may no tongue tellë for pity.
But little out of Pisa stands a tower.
In whichë tower in prison put was he;
And with him be his little children three.
The eldest scarcely five years was of age;
Alas! fortune! it was great cruelty
Such birds as these to put in such a cage.

“Condemned he was to die in that prisón,
For Royer, which that bishop was of Pise,
Had on him made a false suggestión,
Through which the people gan on him arise,
And put him in prisón in such a wise,
As ye have heard, and meat and drink he had
So little that it hardly might suffice,
And therewithal it was full poor and bad.

“And on a day befell that in that hour
When that his meat was wont to be y-brought,
The gaoler shut the doorës of that tower.
He heard it well, although he saw it not;
And in his heart anon there fell a thought
That they his death by hunger did devise.
‘Alas!’ quoth he—‘alas! that I was wrought!’
Therewith the tearës fellë from his eyes.

“His youngest son, that three years was of age,
Unto him said: ‘Father, why do ye weep?
When will the gaoler bring us our pottäge?
Is there no morsel bread that ye do keep?
I am so hungry that I cannot sleep.
Now wouldë God that I might sleep for ever!
Then should not hunger in my belly creep.
There is no thing save bread that I would liever.”

"Thus day by day this child began to cry,
 Till in his father's lap adown he lay,
 And said: 'Farewell, father, I must die!'
 And kissed his father, and died the same day.
 The woeful father saw that dead he lay,
 And his two arms for woe began to bite,
 And said: 'Fortune, alas and well-away!
 For all my woe I blame thy treacherous spite.'

"His children weened that it for hunger was,
 That he his arms gnawed, and not for woe.
 And said: 'Father, do not so, alas!
 But rather eat the flesh upon us two.
 Our flesh thou gavest us, our flesh thou take us fro,
 And eat enough.' Right thus they to him cried;
 And after that, within a day or two,
 They laid them in his lap adown and died."

The father, in despair, likewise died of hunger; and such was the end of the mighty Earl of Pisa, whose tragedy whosoever desires to hear at greater length may read it as told by the great poet of Italy hight Dante.

The other instance is that of *The Pardoner's Tale*, which would appear to have been based on a *fabliau* now lost, though the substance of it is preserved in an Italian novel, and in one or two other versions. For the purpose of noticing how Chaucer arranges as well as tells a story, the following attempt at a condensed prose rendering of his narrative may be acceptable:—

Once upon a time in Flanders there was a company of young men, who gave themselves up to every kind of dissipation and debauchery—haunting the taverns where dancing and dicing continues day and night, eating and drinking, and serving the devil in his own temple by their outrageous life of luxury. It was horrible to hear their oaths, how they tore to pieces our blessed Lord's body, as

if they thought the Jews had not rent Him enough; and each laughed at the sin of the others, and all were alike immersed in gluttony and wantonness.

And so one morning it befel that three of these rioters were sitting over their drink in a tavern, long before the bell had rung for nine-o'clock prayers. And as they sat, they heard a bell clinking before a corpse that was being carried to the grave. So one of them bade his servant-lad go and ask what was the name of the dead man; but the boy said that he knew it already, and that it was the name of an old companion of his master's. As he had been sitting drunk on a bench, there had come a privy thief, whom men called Death, and who slew all the people in this country; and he had smitten the drunken man's heart in two with his spear, and had then gone on his way without any more words. This Death had slain a thousand during the present pestilence; and the boy thought it worth warning his master to beware of such an adversary, and to be ready to meet him at any time. "So my mother taught me; I say no more." "Marry," said the keeper of the tavern; "the child tells the truth: this Death has slain all the inhabitants of a great village not far from here; I think that there must be the place where he dwells." Then the rioter swore with some of his big oaths that he at least was not afraid of this Death, and that he would seek him out wherever he dwelt. And at his instance his two boon-companions joined with him in a vow that before nightfall they would slay the false traitor Death, who was the slayer of so many; and the vow they swore was one of closest fellowship between them—to live and die for one another as if they had been brethren born. And so they went forth in their drunken fury towards the village of which the taverner had spoken, with

terrible execrations on their lips that "Death should be dead, if they might catch him."

They had not gone quite half a mile when, at a stile between two fields, they came upon a poor old man, who meekly greeted them with a "God save you, sirs." But the proudest of the three rioters answered him roughly, asking him why he kept himself all wrapped up except his face, and how so old a fellow as he had managed to keep alive so long? And the old man looked him straight in the face and replied, "Because in no town or village, though I journey as far as the Indies, can I find a man willing to exchange his youth for my age; and therefore I must keep it so long as God wills it so. Death, alas! will not have my life, and so I wander about like a restless fugitive, and early and late I knock on the ground, which is my mother's gate, with my staff, and say, 'Dear mother, let me in! behold how I waste away! Alas! when shall my bones be at rest? Mother, gladly will I give you my chest containing all my worldly gear in return for a shroud to wrap me in.' But she refuses me that grace, and that is why my face is pale and withered. But you, sirs, are uncourteous to speak rudely to an inoffensive old man, when Holy Writ bids you reverence grey hairs. Therefore, never again give offence to an old man, if you wish men to be courteous to you in your age, should you live so long. And so God be with you; I must go whither I have to go." But the second rioter prevented him, and swore he should not depart so lightly. "Thou spakest just now of that traitor Death, who slays all our friends in this country. As thou art his spy, hear me swear that, unless thou tellest where he is, thou shalt die; for thou art in his plot to slay us young men, thou false thief!" Then the old man told them that if they were so desirous

of finding Death, they had but to turn up a winding path to which he pointed, and there they would find him they sought in a grove under an oak-tree, where the old man had just left him; "he will not try to hide himself for all your boasting. And so may God the Redeemer save you and amend you!" And when he had spoken, all the three rioters ran till they came to the tree. But what they found there was a treasure of golden florins—nearly seven bushels of them, as they thought. Then they no longer sought after Death, but sat down all three by the shining gold. And the youngest of them spoke first, and declared that Fortune had given this treasure to them, so that they might spend the rest of their lives in mirth and jollity. The question was how to take this money—which clearly belonged to some one else—safely to the house of one of the three companions. It must be done by night; so let them draw lots, and let him on whom the lot fell run to the town to fetch bread and wine, while the other two guarded the treasure carefully till the night came, when they might agree whither to transport it.

The lot fell on the youngest, who forthwith went his way to the town. Then one of those who remained with the treasure said to the other: "Thou knowest well that thou art my sworn brother, and I will tell thee something to thy advantage. Our companion is gone, and here is a great quantity of gold to be divided among us three. But say, if I could manage so that the gold is divided between us two, should I not do thee a friend's turn?" And when the other failed to understand him, he made him promise secrecy, and disclosed his plan. "Two are stronger than one. When he sits down, arise as if thou wouldest sport with him; and while thou art struggling with him as in play, I will rive him through both his sides; and look

thou do the same with thy dagger. After which, my dear friend, we will divide all the gold between you and me, and then we may satisfy all our desires and play at dice to our hearts' content."

Meanwhile the youngest rioter, as he went up to the town, revolved in his heart the beauty of the bright new florins, and said unto himself: "If only I could have all this gold to myself alone, there is no man on earth who would live so merrily as I." And at last the Devil put it into his relentless heart to buy poison, in order with it to kill his two companions. And straightway he went on into the town to an apothecary, and besought him to sell him some poison for destroying some rats which infested his house, and a polecat which, he said, had made away with his capons. And the apothecary said: "Thou shalt have something of which (so may God save my soul!) no creature in all the world could swallow a single grain without losing his life thereby—and that in less time than thou wouldest take to walk a mile in." So the miscreant shut up this poison in a box, and then he went into the next street and borrowed three large bottles, into two of which he poured his poison, while the third he kept clean to hold drink for himself; for he meant to work hard all the night to carry away the gold. So he filled his three bottles with wine, and then went back to his companions under the tree.

What need to make a long discourse of what followed? As they had plotted their comrade's death, so they slew him, and that at once. And when they had done this, the one who had counselled the deed said, "Now let us sit and drink and make merry, and then we will bury his body." And it happened to him by chance to take one of the bottles which contained the poison; and he drank, and gave

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drink of it to his fellow; and thus they both speedily died.

The plot of this story is, as observed, not Chaucer's. But how carefully, how artistically, the narrative is elaborated, incident by incident, and point by point! How well every effort is prepared, and how well every turn of the story is explained! Nothing is superfluous, but everything is arranged with care, down to the circumstances of the bottles being bought, for safety's sake, in the next street to the apothecary's, and of two out of three bottles being filled with poison, which is at once a proceeding natural in itself, and increases the chances against the two rioters when they are left to choose for themselves. This it is to be a good story-teller. But of a different order is the change introduced by Chaucer into his original, where the old hermit—who, of course, is Death himself—is fleeing from Death. Chaucer's Old Man is *seeking* Death, but seeking him in vain—like the Wandering Jew of the legend. This it is to be a poet.

Of course it is always necessary to be cautious before asserting any apparent addition of Chaucer's to be his own invention. Thus, in the *Merchant's Tale*, the very naughty plot of which is anything but original, it is impossible to say whether such is the case with the humorous competition of advice between Justinus and Placebo,¹ or with the fantastic machinery in which Pluto and Proserpine anticipate the part played by Oberon and Titania in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. On the other hand, Chaucer is capable of using goods manifestly borrowed or stolen for

¹ "Placebo" seems to have been a current term to express the character or the ways of "the too deferential man." "Flatterers be the Devil's chaplains, that sing aye *Placebo*."—*Parson's Tale*.

a purpose never intended in their original employment. Puck himself must have guided the audacious hand which could turn over the leaves of so respected a Father of the Church as St. Jerome, in order to derive from his treatise *On Perpetual Virginity* materials for the discourse on matrimony delivered, with illustrations essentially her own, by the *Wife of Bath*.

Two only among these *Tales* are in prose—a vehicle of expression, on the whole, strange to the polite literature of the pre-Renascence ages—but not both for the same reason. The first of these *Tales* is told by the poet himself, after a stop has been unceremoniously put upon his recital of the *Ballad of Sir Thopas* by the Host. The ballad itself is a fragment of straightforward burlesque, which shows that in both the manner and the metre¹ of ancient romances, literary criticism could even in Chaucer's days find its opportunities for satire, though it is going rather far to see in *Sir Thopas* a predecessor of *Don Quixote*. The *Tale of Melibæus* is probably an English version of a French translation of Albert of Brescia's famous *Book of Consolation and Counsel*, which comprehends in a slight narrative framework a long discussion between the unfortunate Melibæus, whom the wrongs and sufferings inflicted upon him and his have brought to the verge of despair, and his wise helpmate, Dame Prudence. By means of a long argumentation propped up by quotations (not invariably assigned with conscientious accuracy to their actual source) from "The Book," Seneca, "Tullius," and other authors, she at last persuades him not only to reconcile himself to his enemies, but to forgive them, even as he hopes to be forgiven. And thus the *Tale* well bears

¹ Dunbar's burlesque ballad of *Sir Thomas Norray* is in the same stanza.

out the truth impressed upon Melibœus by the following ingeniously combined quotation:—

And there said once a clerk in two verses: What is better than gold? Jasper. And what is better than jasper? Wisdom. And what is better than wisdom? Woman. And what is better than woman? No thing.

Certainly, Chaucer gave proof of consummate tact and taste, as well as of an unaffected personal modesty, in assigning to himself as one of the company of pilgrims, instead of a tale bringing him into competition with the creatures of his own invention, after his mocking ballad has served its turn, nothing more ambitious than a version of a popular discourse—half narrative, half homily—in prose. But a question of far greater difficulty and moment arises with regard to the other prose piece included among the *Canterbury Tales*. Of these the so-called *Parson's Tale* is the last in order of succession. Is it to be looked upon as an integral part of the collection; and, if so, what general and what personal significance should be attached to it?

As it stands, the long tractate or sermon (partly adapted from a popular French religious manual), which bears the name of the *Parson's Tale*, is, if not unfinished, at least internally incomplete. It lacks symmetry, and fails entirely to make good the argument or scheme of divisions with which the sermon begins, as conscientiously as one of Barrow's. Accordingly, an attempt has been made to show that what we have is something different from the "meditation" which Chaucer originally put into his *Parson's* mouth. But, while we may stand in respectful awe of the German daring which, whether the matter in hand be a few pages of Chaucer, a Book of Homer, or a chap

ter of the Old Testament, is fully prepared to show which parts of each are mutilated, which interpolated, and which transposed, we may safely content ourselves, in the present instance, with considering the preliminary question. *A priori*, is there sufficient reason for supposing any transpositions, interpolations, and mutilations to have been introduced into the *Parson's Tale*? The question is full of interest; for while, on the one hand, the character of the *Parson* in the *Prologue* has been frequently interpreted as evidence of sympathy on Chaucer's part with Wycliffism, on the other hand the *Parson's Tale*, in its extant form, goes far to disprove the supposition that its author was a Wycliffite.

This, then, seems the appropriate place for briefly reviewing the vexed question—*Was Chaucer a Wycliffite*? Apart from the character of the *Parson* and from the *Parson's Tale*, what is the nature of our evidence on the subject? In the first place, nothing could be clearer than that Chaucer was a very free-spoken critic of the life of the clergy—more especially of the Regular clergy—of his times. In this character he comes before us from his translation of the *Roman de la Rose* to the *Parson's Tale* itself, where he inveighs with significant earnestness against self-indulgence on the part of those who are Religious, or have “entered into Orders, as sub-deacon, or deacon, or priest, or hospitallers.” In the *Canterbury Tales*, above all, his attacks upon the Friars run nearly the whole gamut of satire, stopping short, perhaps, before the note of high moral indignation. Moreover, as has been seen, his long connexion with John of Gaunt is a well-established fact; and it has thence been concluded that Chaucer fully shared the opinions and tendencies represented by his patron. In the supposition that Chaucer approved of the

countenance for a long time shown by John of Gaunt to Wyclif there is nothing improbable; neither, however, is there anything improbable in this other supposition, that, when the Duke of Lancaster openly washed his hands of the heretical tenets to the utterance of which Wyclif had advanced, Chaucer, together with the large majority of Englishmen, held with the politic duke rather than with the still unflinching Reformer. So long as Wyclif's movement consisted only of an opposition to ecclesiastical pretensions on the one hand, and of an attempt to revive religious sentiment on the other, half the country or more was Wycliffite, and Chaucer no doubt with the rest. But it would require positive evidence to justify the belief that from this feeling Chaucer ever passed to sympathy with *Lollardry*, in the vague but sufficiently intelligible sense attaching to that term in the latter part of Richard the Second's reign. Richard II. himself, whose patronage of Chaucer is certain, in the end attempted rigorously to suppress *Lollardry*; and Henry IV., the politic John of Gaunt's yet more politic son, to whom Chaucer owed the prosperity enjoyed by him in the last year of his life, became a persecutor almost as soon as he became a king.

Though, then, from the whole tone of his mind, Chaucer could not but sympathise with the opponents of ecclesiastical domination—though, as a man of free and critical spirit, and of an inborn ability for penetrating beneath the surface, he could not but find subjects for endless blame and satire in the members of those Mendicant Orders in whom his chief patron's academical ally had recognised the most formidable obstacles to the spread of pure religion—yet all this would not justify us in regarding him as personally a Wycliffite. Indeed, we might as well at once borrow the phraseology of a recent respect-

able critic, and set down Dan Chaucer as a Puritan! The policy of his patron tallied with the view which a fresh practical mind such as Chaucer's would naturally be disposed to take of the influence of monks and friars, or at least of those monks and friars whose vices and foibles were specially prominent in his eyes. There are various reasons why men oppose established institutions in the season of their decay; but a fourteenth-century satirist of the monks, or even of the clergy at large, was not necessarily a Lollard, any more than a nineteenth-century objector to doctors' drugs is necessarily a homœopathist.

But, it is argued by some, Chaucer has not only assailed the false; he has likewise extolled the true. He has painted both sides of the contrast. On the one side are the Monk, the Friar, and the rest of their fellows; on the other is the *Poor Parson of a Town*—a portrait, if not of Wyclif himself, at all events of a Wycliffite priest; and in the *Tale* or sermon put in the Parson's mouth are recognisable beneath the accumulations of interested editors some of the characteristic marks of Wycliffism. Who is not acquainted with the exquisite portrait in question?—

“A good man was there of religioun,
And was a poorë Parson of a town.
But rich he was of holy thought and work.
He was also a learnèd man, a clerk
That Christës Gospel truly wouldë preach;
And his parishioners devoutly teach.
Benign he was, and wondrous diligent,
And in adversity full patiënt.
And such he was y-provèd oftë sithes.
Full loth he was to curse men for his tithes;
But rather would he givë, without doubt,
Unto his poor parishioners about
Of his offring and ðe of his substaunce.
He could in little wealth have súffisaunce.

THE POOR PARSON'S PORTRAIT.

Wide was his parish, houses far asunder,
 Yet failed he not for either rain or thunder
 In sickness nor mischance to visit all
 The furthest in his parish, great and small,
 Upon his feet, and in his hand a staff.
 This noble ensample to his sheep he gave,
 That first he wrought, and afterwards he taught;
 Out of the Gospel he those wordes caught;
 And this figure he added eke thereto,
 That 'if gold rustē, what shall iron do?'
 For if a priest be foul, on whom we trust,
 No wonder is it if a layman rust;
 And shame it is, if that a priest take keep,
 A foul shepherd to see and a clean sheep;
 Well ought a priest ensample for to give
 By his cleanness, how that his sheep should live.
 He put not out his benefice on hire,
 And left his sheep encumbered in the mire,
 And ran to London unto Saintē Paul's,
 To seek himself a chantery for souls,
 Or maintenance with a brotherhood to hold;
 But dwelt at home, and keptē well his fold,
 So that the wolf ne'er made it to miscarry;
 He was a shepherd and no mercenary.
 And though he holy were, and virtuous,
 He was to sinful man not déspitous,
 And of his speech nor difficult nor digne,
 But in his teaching discreet and benign.
 For to draw folk to heaven by fairness,
 By good ensample, this was his business:
 But were there any person obstinate,
 What so he were, of high or low estate,
 Him would he sharply snub at once. Than this
 A better priest, I trow, there nowhere is.
 He waited for no pomp and reverence,
 Nor made himself a spiced conscience;
 But Christ's lore and His Apostles' twelve
 He taught, but first he followed it himself."

The most striking features in this portrait are undoubtedly those which are characteristics of the good and humble working clergyman of all times; and some of these, accordingly, Goldsmith could appropriately borrow for his gentle poetic sketch of his parson-brother in "Sweet Auburn." But there are likewise points in the sketch which may be fairly described as specially distinctive of Wyclif's Simple Priests—though, as should be pointed out, these Priests could not themselves be designated parsons of towns. Among the latter features are the specially evangelical source of the *Parson's* learning and teaching; and his outward appearance—the wandering, staff in hand, which was specially noted in an archiepiscopal diatribe against these novel ministers of the people. Yet it seems unnecessary to conclude anything beyond this: that the feature which Chaucer desired above all to mark and insist upon in his *Parson*, was the poverty and humility which in him contrasted with the luxurious self-indulgence of the *Monk*, and the blatant insolence of the *Pardoner*. From this point of view it is obvious why the *Parson* is made brother to the *Ploughman*; for, in drawing the latter, Chaucer cannot have forgotten that other Ploughman whom Langland's poem had identified with Him for whose sake Chaucer's poor workman laboured for his poor neighbours, with the readiness always shown by the best of his class. Nor need this recognition of the dignity of the lowly surprise us in Chaucer, who had both sense of justice and sense of humour enough not to flatter one class at the expense of the rest, and who elsewhere (in the *Mancipie's Tale*) very forcibly puts the truth that what in a great man is called a *coup d'état* is called by a much simpler name in a humbler fellow-sinner.

But though, in the *Parson of a Town*, Chaucer may not

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have wished to paint a Wycliffite priest—still less a Lollard, under which designation so many varieties of malcontents, in addition to the followers of Wyclif, were popularly included—yet his eyes and ears were open; and he knew well enough what the world and its children are at all times apt to call those who are not ashamed of their religion, as well as those who make too conscious a profession of it. The world called them Lollards at the close of the fourteenth century, and it called them Puritans at the close of the sixteenth, and Methodists at the close of the eighteenth. Doubtless the vintners and the shipmen of Chaucer's day, the patrons and purveyors of the playhouse in Ben Jonson's, the fox-hunting squires and town wits of Cowper's, like their successors after them, were not specially anxious to distinguish nicely between more or less abominable varieties of saintliness. Hence, when Master Harry Bailly's tremendous oaths produce the gentlest of protests from the *Parson*, the jovial *Host* incontinently "smells a Lollard in the wind," and predicts (with a further flow of expletives) that there is a sermon to follow. Whereupon the *Shipman* protests not less characteristically:—

"'Nay, by my father's soul, that shall he not,'
Saidð the Shipman; 'here shall he not preach:
He shall no gospel here explain or teach.
We all believe in the great God,' quoth he;
'He wouldë sowë some difficulty,
Or springë cockle in our cleane corn.'"¹

After each of the pilgrims except the *Parson* has told a tale (so that obviously Chaucer designed one of the divisions of his work to close with the *Parson's*), he is again

¹ The nickname Lollards was erroneously derived from *lolia* (tares).

called upon by the *Host*. Herenpon appealing to the undoubtedly evangelical and, it might without straining be said, Wycliffite authority of Timothy, he promises as his contribution a "merry tale in prose," which proves to consist of a moral discourse. In its extant form the *Parson's Tale* contains, by the side of much that might suitably have come from a Wycliffite teacher, much of a directly opposite nature. For not only is the necessity of certain sacramental usages to which Wyclif strongly objected insisted upon, but the spoliation of Church property is unctuously inveighed against as a species of one of the cardinal sins. No enquiry could satisfactorily establish how much of this was taken over or introduced into the *Parson's Tale* by Chaucer himself. But one would fain at least claim for him a passage in perfect harmony with the character drawn of the *Parson* in the *Prologue*—a passage (already cited in part in the opening section of the present essay) where the poet advocates the cause of the poor in words which, simple as they are, deserve to be quoted side by side with that immortal character itself. The concluding lines may therefore be cited here:—

"Think also that of the same seed of which churls spring, of the same seed spring lords; as well may the churl be saved as the lord. Wherefore I counsel thee, do just so with thy churl as thou wouldest thy lord did with thee, if thou wert in his plight. A very sinful man is a churl as towards sin. I counsel thee certainly, thou lord, that thou work in such wise with thy churls that they rather love thee than dread thee. I know well, where there is degree above degree, it is reasonable that men should do their duty where it is due; but of a certainty, extortions, and despite of our underlings, are damnable."

In sum, the *Parson's Tale* cannot, any more than the character of the *Parson* in the *Prologue*, be interpreted as proving Chaucer to have been a Wycliffite. But the one

as well as the other proves him to have perceived much of what was noblest in the Wycliffite movement, and much of what was ignoblest in the reception with which it met at the hands of worldlings — before, with the aid of the State, the Church finally succeeded in crushing it, to all appearance, out of existence.

The *Parson's Tale* contains a few vigorous touches, in addition to the fine passage quoted, which make it difficult to deny that Chaucer's hand was concerned in it. The inconsistency between the religious learning ascribed to the *Parson* and a passage in the *Tale*, where the author leaves certain things to be settled by divines, will not be held of much account. The most probable conjecture seems, therefore, to be that the discourse has come down to us in a mutilated form. This *may* be due to the *Tale* having remained unfinished at the time of Chaucer's death; in which case it would form last words of no unfitting kind. As for the actual last words of the *Canterbury Tales* — the so-called *Prayer of Chaucer* — it would be unbearable to have to accept them as genuine. For in these the poet, while praying for the forgiveness of sins, is made specially to entreat the Divine pardon for his "translations and inditing in worldly vanities," which he "revokes in his retractions." These include, besides the Book of the Leo (doubtless a translation or adaptation from Machault) and many other books which the writer forgets, and "many a song and many a lecherous lay," all the principal poetical works of Chaucer (with the exception of the *Romaunt of the Rose*) discussed in this essay. On the other hand, he offers thanks for having had the grace given him to compose his translation of Boëthius and other moral and devotional works. There is, to be sure, no actual evidence to decide in either way

the question as to the genuineness of this *Prayer*, which is entirely one of internal probability. Those who will may believe that the monks, who were the landlords of Chaucer's house at Westminster, had in one way or the other obtained a controlling influence over his mind. Stranger things than this have happened; but one prefers to believe that the poet of the *Canterbury Tales* remained master of himself to the last. He had written much which a dying man might regret; but it would be sad to have to think that, "because of humility," he bore false witness at the last against an immortal part of himself—his poetic genius.

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CHAPTER III.

CHARACTERISTICS OF CHAUCER AND OF HIS POETRY.

Thus, then, Chaucer had passed away — whether in good or in evil odour with the powerful interest with which John of Gaunt's son had entered into his unwritten concordate, after all, matters but little now.. He is no dim shadow to us, even in his outward presence; for we possess sufficient materials from which to picture to ourselves with good assurance what manner of man he was. Occleve painted from memory, on the margin of one of his own works, a portrait of his "worthy master," over against a passage in which, after praying the Blessed Virgin to intercede for the eternal happiness of one who had written so much in her honour, he proceeds as follows:—

"Although his life be quenched, the résemblance
Of him hath in me so fresh liveliness,
That to put other men in rémembrance
Of his persón I have here his likenéss
Made, to this end in very soothfastness,
That they that have of him lost thought and mind
May by the painting here again him find."

In this portrait, in which the experienced eye of Sir Harris Nicolas sees "incomparably the best portrait of Chaucer yet discovered," he appears as an elderly rather than aged man, clad in dark gown and hood—the latter of the

fashion so familiar to us from this very picture, and from the well-known one of Chaucer's last patron, King Henry IV. His attitude in this likeness is that of a quiet talker, with downcast eyes, but sufficiently erect bearing of body. One arm is extended, and seems to be gently pointing some observation which has just issued from the poet's lips. The other holds a rosary, which may be significant of the piety attributed to Chaucer by Occleve, or may be a mere ordinary accompaniment of conversation, as it is in parts of Greece to the present day. The features are mild but expressive, with just a suspicion — certainly no more — of saturnine or sarcastic humour. The lips are full, and the nose is what is called good by the learned in such matters. Several other early portraits of Chaucer exist, all of which are stated to bear much resemblance to one another. Among them is one in an early if not contemporary copy of Occleve's poems, full-length, and superscribed by the hand which wrote the manuscript. In another, which is extremely quaint, he appears on horseback, in commemoration of his ride to Canterbury, and is represented as short of stature, in accordance with the description of himself in the *Canterbury Tales*.

For, as it fortunately happens, he has drawn his likeness for us with his own hand, as he appeared on the occasion to that most free-spoken of observers and most personal of critics, the host of the Tabard, the "eccl." and marshal of the company of pilgrims. The fellow-travellers had just been wonderfully sobered (as well they might be) by the piteous tale of the Prioress concerning the little clergy-boy—how, after the wicked Jews had cut his throat because he ever sang *O Alma Redemptoris*, and had cast him into a pit, he was found there by his mother loudly giving forth the hymn in honour of the Blessed Virgin which he

had loved so well. Master Harry Bailly was, as in duty bound, the first to interrupt by a string of jests the silence which had ensued:—

“And then at first he lookèd upon me,
And saidè thus: ‘What man art thou?’ quoth he;
‘Thou lookèst as thou wouldèst find a hare,
For ever upon the ground I see thee stare.
Approach more near, and lookè merrily!
Now ’ware you, sirs, and let this man have space.
He in the waist is shaped as well as I;
This were a puppet in an arm to embrace
For any woman, small and fair of face.
He seemeth elfish by his countenance,
For unto no wight doth he dalliânce.’”

From this passage we may gather, not only that Chaucer was, as the *Host* of the Tabard’s transparent self-irony implies, small of stature and slender, but that he was accustomed to be twitted on account of the abstracted or absent look which so often tempts children of the world to offer its wearer a penny for his thoughts. For “elfish” means bewitched by the elves, and hence vacant or absent in demeanour.

It is thus, with a few modest but manifestly truthful touches, that Chaucer, after the manner of certain great painters, introduces his own figure into a quiet corner of his crowded canvas. But mere outward likeness is of little moment, and it is a more interesting enquiry whether there are any personal characteristics of another sort, which it is possible with safety to ascribe to him, and which must be, in a greater or less degree, connected with the distinctive qualities of his literary genius; for in truth it is but a sorry makeshift of literary biographers to seek to divide a man who is an author into two separate be-

ings, in order to avoid the conversely fallacious procedure of accounting for everything which an author has written by something which the *man* has done or been inclined to do. What true poet has sought to hide, or succeeded in hiding, his moral nature from his muse? None in the entire band, from Petrarch to Villon, and least of all the poet whose song, like so much of Chaucer's, seems freshly derived from Nature's own inspiration.

One very pleasing quality in Chaucer must have been his modesty. In the course of his life this may have helped to recommend him to patrons so many and so various, and to make him the useful and trustworthy agent that he evidently became for confidential missions abroad. Physically, as has been seen, he represents himself as prone to the habit of casting his eyes on the ground; and we may feel tolerably sure that to this external manner corresponded a quiet, observant disposition, such as that which may be held to have distinguished the greatest of Chaucer's successors among English poets. To us, of course, this quality of modesty in Chaucer makes itself principally manifest in the opinion which he incidentally shows himself to entertain concerning his own rank and claims as an author. Herein, as in many other points a contrast is noticeable between him and the great Italian masters, who were so sensitive as to the esteem in which they and their poetry were held. Who could fancy Chaucer crowned with laurel, like Petrarch, or even, like Dante, speaking with proud humility of "the beautiful style that has done honour to him," while acknowledging his obligation for it to a great predecessor? Chaucer again and again disclaims all boasts of perfection, or pretensions to pre-eminence, as a poet. His Canterbury Pilgrims have in his name to disavow, like Persius, having slept on Mount Parnassus, or

possessing "rhetoric" enough to describe a heroine's beauty; and he openly allows that his spirit grows dull as he grows older, and that he finds a difficulty as a translator in matching his rhymes to his French original. He acknowledges as incontestable the superiority of the poets of classical antiquity:—

"... Little book, no writing thou envy,
But subject be to all true poësy,
And kiss the steps, where'er thou seest space
Of Virgil, Ovid, Homer, Lucan, Stace."¹

But more than this. In the *House of Fame* he expressly disclaims having in his light and imperfect verse sought to pretend to "mastery" in the art poetical; and in a charmingly expressed passage of the *Prologue* to the *Legend of Good Women* he describes himself as merely following in the wake of those who have already reaped the harvest of amorous song, and have carried away the corn:—

"And I come after, gleanings here and there,
And am full glad if I can find an ear
Of any goodly word that ye have left."

Modesty of this stamp is perfectly compatible with a certain self-consciousness which is hardly ever absent from greatness, and which at all events supplies a stimulus not easily dispensed with except by sustained effort on the part of a poet. The two qualities seem naturally to combine into that self-containedness (very different from self-contentedness) which distinguishes Chaucer, and which helps to give to his writings a manliness of tone, the direct opposite of the irretentive querulousness found in so great a number of poets in all times. He cannot, indeed,

¹ Statius.

be said to maintain an absolute reserve concerning himself and his affairs in his writings; but as he grows older, he seems to become less and less inclined to take the public into his confidence, or to speak of himself except in a pleasantly light and incidental fashion. And in the same spirit he seems, without ever folding his hands in his lap, or ceasing to be a busy man and an assiduous author, to have grown indifferent to the lack of brilliant success in life, whether as a man of letters or otherwise. So at least one seems justified in interpreting a remarkable passage in the *House of Fame*, the poem in which, perhaps, Chaucer allows us to see more deeply into his mind than in any other. After surveying the various company of those who had come as suitors for the favours of Fame, he tells us how it seemed to him (in his long December dream) that some one spoke to him in a kindly way,

"And saidȝ: 'Friend, what is thy name?
Art thou come hither to have fame?'
'Nay, forsoothȝ, friend!' quoth I;
'I came not hither (grand merci!)
For no such causȝ, by my head!
Sufficeth me, as I were dead,
That no wight have my name in hand.
I wot myself best how I stand;
For what I suffer, or what I think,
I will myselfȝ all it drink,
Or at least the greater part
As far forth as I know my art.'"

With this modest but manly self-possession we shall not go far wrong in connecting what seems another very distinctly marked feature of Chaucer's inner nature. He seems to have arrived at a clear recognition of the truth with which Goethe humorously comforted Eckermann in the shape of the proverbial saying, "Care has been taken

that the trees shall not grow into the sky." Chaucer's, there is every reason to believe, was a contented faith, as far removed from self-torturing unrest as from childish credulity. Hence his refusal to trouble himself, now that he has arrived at a good age, with original research as to the constellations. (The passage is all the more significant since Chaucer, as has been seen, actually possessed a very respectable knowledge of astronomy.) That winged encyclopædia, the Eagle, has just been regretting the poet's unwillingness to learn the position of the Great and the Little Bear, Castor and Pollux, and the rest, concerning which at present he does not know where they stand. But he replies, "No matter!

"... It is no need;
I trust as well (so God me speed!)
Them that write of this matter,
As though I knew their places there."

Moreover, as he says (probably without implying any special allegorical meaning), they seem so bright that it would destroy my eyes to look upon them. Personal inspection, in his opinion, was not necessary for a faith which at some times may, and at others must, take the place of knowledge; for we find him, at the opening of the *Prologue* to the *Legend of Good Women*, in a passage the tone of which should not be taken to imply less than its words express, writing as follows:—

"A thousand times I have heard men tell,
That there is joy in heaven, and pain in hell;
And I accordè well that it is so.
But nathëless, yet wot I well alsó,
That there is none doth in this country dwell
That either hath in heaven been or hell,

Or any other way could of it know,
 But that he heard, or found it written so,
 For by assay may no man proof receive.
 But God forbid that men should not believe
 More things than they have ever seen with eye!
 Men shall not farcy everything a lie
 Unless themselves it see, or else it do;
 For, God wot, not the less a thing is true,
 Though every wight may not it chance to see."

The central thought of these lines, though it afterwards receives a narrower and more commonplace application, is no other than that which has been so splendidly expressed by Spenser in the *complet*:—

"Why then should witless man so much misween
 That nothing is but that which he hath seen?"

The *negative* result produced in Chaucer's mind by this firm but placid way of regarding matters of faith was a distrust of astrology, alchemy, and all the superstitions which in the *Parson's Tale* are noticed as condemned by the Church. This distrust on Chaucer's part requires no further illustration after what has been said elsewhere; it would have been well for his age if all its children had been as clear-sighted in these matters as he, to whom the practices connected with these delusive sciences seemed, and justly so from his point of view, not less impious than futile. His *Canon Yeoman's Tale*, a story of imposture so vividly dramatic in its catastrophe as to have suggested to Ben Jonson one of the most effective passages in his comedy *The Alchemist*, concludes with a moral of unmistakeable solemnity against the sinfulness, as well as uselessness, of "multiplying" (making gold by the arts of alchemy):—

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CHARACTERISTICS OF CHAUCER.

"... Whoso maketh God his adversáry,
As for to work anything in contráry
Unto His will, certes ne'er shall he thrive,
Though that he multiply through all his life."

But equally unmistakeable is the *positive* side of this frame of mind in such a passage as the following—which is one of those belonging to Chaucer himself, and not taken from his French original—in *The Man of Law's Tale*. The narrator is speaking of the voyage of Constance, after her escape from the massacre in which, at a feast, all her fellow-Christians had been killed, and of how she was borne by the "wild wave" from "Surrey" (Syria) to the Northumbrian shore:—

"Here men might askē, why she was not slain?
Eke at the feast who might her body save?
And I answerē that demand again:
Who savēd Daniel in th' horrible cave,
When every wight save him, master or knave,
The lion ate—before he could depart?
No wight but God, whom he bare in his heart."

"In her," he continues, "God desired to show His miraculous power, so that we should see His mighty works; for Christ, in whom we have a remedy for every ill, often by means of His own does things for ends of His own, which are obscure to the wit of man, incapable, by reason of our ignorance, of understanding His wise providence. But since Constance was not slain at the feast, it might be asked: Who kept her from drowning in the sea? Who, then, kept Jonas in the belly of the whale till he was spouted up at Ninive? Well do we know it was no one but He who kept the Hebrew people from drowning in the waters, and made them to pass through the sea with

dry feet. Who bade the four spirits of the tempest, which have the power to trouble land and sea, north and south, and west and east, vex neither sea nor land nor the trees that grow on it? Truly these things were ordered by Him who kept this woman safe from the tempest, as well when she awoke as when she slept. But whence might this woman have meat and drink, and how could her sustenance last out to her for three years and more? Who, then, fed Saint Mary the Egyptian in the cavern or in the desert? Assuredly no one but Christ. It was a great miracle to feed five thousand folk with five loaves and two fishes; but God in their great need sent to them abundance."

As to the sentiments and opinions of Chaucer, then, on matters such as these, we can entertain no reasonable doubt. But we are altogether too ill acquainted with the details of his personal life, and with the motives which contributed to determine its course, to be able to arrive at any valid conclusions as to the way in which his principles affected his conduct. Enough has been already said concerning the attitude seemingly observed by him towards the great public questions, and the great historical events, of his day. If he had strong political opinions of his own, or strong personal views on questions either of ecclesiastical policy or of religious doctrine—in which assumptions there seems nothing probable—he, at all events, did not wear his heart on his sleeve, or use his poetry, allegorical or otherwise, as a vehicle of his wishes, hopes, or fears on these heads. The true breath of freedom could hardly be expected to blow through the precincts of a Plantagenet court. If Chaucer could write the pretty lines in the *Manciple's Tale* about the caged bird and its uncontrollable desire for liberty, his contemporary Barbour could

apostrophise Freedom itself as a noble thing, in words the simple manliness of which stirs the blood after a very different fashion. Concerning his domestic relations, we may regard it as virtually certain that he was unhappy as a husband, though tender and affectionate as a father. Considering how vast a proportion of the satire of all times—but more especially that of the Middle Ages, and in these again pre-eminently of the period of European literature which took its tone from Jean de Meung—is directed against woman and against married life, it would be difficult to decide how much of the irony, sarcasm, and fun lavished by Chaucer on these themes is due to a fashion with which he readily fell in, and how much to the impulse of personal feeling. A perfect anthology, or perhaps one should rather say, a complete herbarium, might be collected from his works of samples of these attacks on women. He has manifestly made a careful study of their ways, with which he now and then betrays that curiously intimate acquaintance to which we are accustomed in a Richardson or a Balzac. How accurate are such incidental remarks as this, that women are “full measurable” in such matters as sleep—not caring for so much of it at a time as men do! How wonderfully natural is the description of Cressid’s bevy of lady-visitors, attracted by the news that she is shortly to be surrendered to the Greeks, and of the “nice vanity”—i. e., foolish emptiness—of their consolatory gossip. “As men see in town, and all about, that women are accustomed to visit their friends,” so a swarm of ladies came to Cressid, “and sat themselves down, and said as I shall tell. ‘I am delighted,’ says one, ‘that you will so soon see your father.’ ‘Indeed I am not so delighted,’ says another, ‘for we have not seen half enough of her since she has been at Troy.’ ‘I do hope,’ quoth

the third, 'that she will bring us back peace with her; in which case may Almighty God guide her on her departure.' And Cressid heard these words and womanish things as if she were far away; for she was burning all the time with another passion than any of which they knew; so that she almost felt her heart die for woe, and for weariness of that company." But his satire against women is rarely so innocent as this; and though several ladies take part in the Canterbury Pilgrimage, yet pilgrim after pilgrim has his saw or jest against their sex. The courteous *Knight* cannot refrain from the generalisation that women all follow the favour of fortune. The *Summoner*, who is of a less scrupulous sort, introduces a diatribe against women's passionate love of vengeance; and the *Shipman* seasons a story which requires no such addition by an enumeration of their favourite foibles. But the climax is reached in the confessions of the *Wife of Bath*, who quite unhesitatingly says that women are best won by flattery and busy attentions; that when won they desire to have the sovereignty over their husbands, and that they tell untruths and swear to them with twice the boldness of men; while as to the power of their tongue, she quotes the second-hand authority of her fifth husband for the saying that it is better to dwell with a lion or a foul dragon than with a woman accustomed to chide. It is true that this same *Wife of Bath* also observes with an effective *tu quoque*:—

"By God, if women had but written stories,
As clerkës have within their oratòries,
They would have writ of men more wickednéss
Than all the race of Adam may redress;"

and the *Legend of Good Women* seems, in point of fact, to have been intended to offer some such kind of amends

as is here declared to be called for. But the balance still remains heavy against the poet's sentiments of gallantry and respect for women. It should, at the same time, be remembered that among the *Canterbury Tales* the two which are of their kind the most effective constitute tributes to the most distinctively feminine and wifely virtue of fidelity. Moreover, when coming from such personages as the pilgrims who narrate the *Tales* in question, the praise of women has special significance and value. The *Merchant* and the *Shipman* may indulge in facetious or coarse jibes against wives and their behaviour; but the *Man of Law*, full of grave experience of the world, is a witness above suspicion to the womanly virtue of which his narrative celebrates so illustrious an example, while the *Clerk of Oxford* has in his cloistered solitude, where all womanly blandishments are unknown, come to the conclusion that

"Men speak of Job, most for his humbleness,
As clerkës, when they list, can well indite,
Of men in special; but, in truthfulness,
Though praise by clerks of women be but slight,
No man in humbleness can him acquit
As women can, nor can be half so true
As women are, unless all things be new."

As to marriage, Chaucer may be said generally to treat it in that style of laughing with a wry mouth, which has from time immemorial been affected both in comic writing and on the comic stage, but which in the end even the most determined old bachelor feels an occasional inclination to consider monotonous.

In all this, however, it is obvious that something at least must be set down to conventionality. Yet the best part of Chaucer's nature, it is hardly necessary to say, was

neither conventional nor commonplace. He was not, we may rest assured, one of that numerous class which in his days, as it does in ours, composed the population of the land of Philistia—the persons so well defined by the Scottish poet, Sir David Lyndsay (himself a courtier of the noblest type):—

“Who fixèd have their hearts and whole intents
On sensual lust, on dignity, and rents.”

Doubtless Chaucer was a man of practical good sense, desirous of suitable employment and of a sufficient income; nor can we suppose him to have been one of those who look upon social life and its enjoyments with a jaundiced eye, or who, absorbed in things which are not of this world, avert their gaze from it altogether. But it is hardly possible that rank and position should have been valued on their own account by one who so repeatedly recurs to his ideal of the true gentleman, as to a conception dissociated from mere outward circumstances, and more particularly independent of birth or inherited wealth. At times, we know, men find what they seek; and so Chaucer found in Boëthius and in Guillaume de Lorris that conception which he both translates and reproduces, besides repeating it in a little *Ballade*, probably written by him in the last *decennium* of his life. By far the best-known and the finest of these passages is that in the *Wife of Bath's Tale*, which follows the round assertion that the “arrogance” against which it protests is not worth a hen; and which is followed by an appeal to a parallel passage in Dante:—

“Look, who that is most virtuous alway
Privy and open, and most intendeth aye

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To do the gentle deedës that he can,
 Take him for the greatest gentleman.
 Christ wills we claim of Him our gentleness,
 Not of our elders for their old richës.
 For though they give us all their heritâge
 Through which we claim to be of high parâge,
 Yet may they not bequeathë for no thing—
 To none of us—their virtuous living,
 That made them gentlemen y-callèd be,
 And bade us follow them in such degree.
 Well can the wisë poet of Florënce,
 That Darte hightë, speak of this sentence;
 Lo, in such manner of rhyme is Dante's tale:
 'Seldom upriëth by its branches small
 Prowess of man; for God of His prowëss
 Wills that we claim of Him our gentleness;
 For of our ancestors we no thing claim
 But temporal thing, that men may hurt and maim.'"¹

By the still ignobler greed of money for its own sake, there is no reason whatever to suppose Chaucer to have been at any time actuated; although, under the pressure of immediate want, he devoted a *Complaint* to his empty purse, and made known, in the proper quarters, his desire to see it refilled. Finally, as to what is commonly called pleasure, he may have shared the fashions and even the vices of his age; but we know hardly anything on the subject,

¹ The passage in Canto viii. of the *Purgatorio* is thus translated by Longfellow:

"Not oftentimes upriëth through the branches
 The probity of man; and this He wills
 Who gives it, so that we may ask of Him."

Its intention is only to show that the son is not necessarily what the father is before him; thus, Edward I. of England is a mightier man than was his father Henry III. Chaucer has ingeniously, though not altogether legitimately, pressed the passage into his service.

except that excess in wine, which is often held a pardonable peccadillo in a poet, receives his emphatic condemnation. It would be hazardous to assert of him, as Herrick asserted of himself, that though his "Muse was jocund, his life was chaste;" inasmuch as his name occurs in one unfortunate connexion full of suspiciousness. But we may at least believe him to have spoken his own sentiments in the Doctor of Physic's manly declaration that

"... Of all treason sovereign pestilence
Is when a man betrayeth innocence."

His true pleasures lay far away from those of vanity and dissipation. In the first place, he seems to have been a passionate reader. To his love of books he is constantly referring; indeed, this may be said to be the only kind of egotism which he seems to take a pleasure in indulging. At the opening of his earliest extant poem of consequence, the *Book of the Duchess*, he tells us how he preferred to drive away a night rendered sleepless through melancholy thoughts, by means of a book, which he thought better entertainment than a game either at chess or at "tables." This passion lasted longer with him than the other passion which it had helped to allay; for in the sequel to the well-known passage in the *House of Fame*, already cited, he gives us a glimpse of himself at home, absorbed in his favourite pursuit:—

"Thou go'st home to thy house anon,
And there, as dumb as any stone,
Thou sittest at another book,
Till fully dazed is thy look;
And liv'st thus as a hermit quite,
Although thy abstinence is slight."

And doubtless he counted the days lost in which he was

prevented from following the rule of life which elsewhere he sets himself, "to study and to read alway, day by day," and pressed even the nights into his service when he was not making his head ache with writing. How eager and, considering the times in which he lived, how diverse a reader he was, has already been abundantly illustrated in the course of this volume. His knowledge of Holy Writ was considerable, though it probably, for the most part, came to him at second-hand. He seems to have had some acquaintance with patristic and homiletic literature; he produced a version of the homily on Mary Magdalene, improperly attributed to Origen; and, as we have seen, emulated King Alfred in translating Boëthius's famous manual of moral philosophy. His Latin learning extended over a wide range of literature, from Virgil and Ovid down to some of the favourite Latin poets of the Middle Ages. It is to be feared that he occasionally read Latin authors with so eager a desire to arrive at the contents of their books that he at times mistook their meaning—not far otherwise, slightly to vary a happy comparison made by one of his most eminent commentators, than many people read Chaucer's own writings now-a-days. That he possessed any knowledge at all of Greek may be doubted, both on general grounds and on account of a little slip or two in quotation of a kind not unusual with those who quote what they have not previously read. His *Troilus and Cressid* has only a very distant connexion, indeed, with Homer, whose *Iliad*, before it furnished materials for the mediæval Troilus-legend, had been filtered through a brief Latin epitome, and diluted into a Latin novel, and a journal kept at the seat of war. of altogether apocryphal value. And, indeed, it must in general be conceded that, if Chaucer had read much, he lays claim to having read more;

for he not only occasionally ascribes to known authors works which we can by no means feel certain as to their having written, but at times he even cites (or is made to cite, in all the editions of his works) authors who are altogether unknown to fame by the names which he gives to them. But then it must be remembered that other mediæval writers have rendered themselves liable to the same kind of charge. Quoting was one of the dominant literary fashions of the age; and just as a word without an oath went for but little in conversation, so a statement or sentiment in writing acquired a greatly enhanced value when suggested by authority, even after no more precise a fashion than the use of the phrase "as old books say." In Chaucer's days the equivalent of the modern "I have seen it said *somewhere*"—with, perhaps, the venturesome addition: "I *think*, in Horace"—had clearly not become an objectionable expletive.

Of modern literatures there can be no doubt that Chaucer had made substantially his own the two which could be of importance to him as a poet. His obligations to the French singers have probably been over-estimated—at all events, if the view adopted in this essay be the correct one, and if the charming poem of the *Flower and the Leaf*, together with the lively, but as to its meaning not very transparent, so-called *Chaucer's Dream*, be denied admission among his genuine works. At the same time, the influence of the *Roman de la Rose* and that of the courtly poets, of whom Machault was the chief in France and Froissart the representative in England, are perceptible in Chaucer almost to the last, nor is it likely that he should ever have ceased to study and assimilate them. On the other hand, the extent of his knowledge of Italian literature has probably till of late been underrated in an almost

Undou

equal degree. This knowledge displays itself not only in the imitation or adaptation of particular poems, but more especially in the use made of incidental passages and details. In this way his debts to Dante were especially numerous; and it is curious to find proofs so abundant of Chaucer's relatively close study of a poet with whose genius his own had so few points in common. Notwithstanding first appearances, it is an open question whether Chaucer had ever read Boccaccio's *Decamerone*, with which he may merely have had in common the sources of several of his *Canterbury Tales*. But as he certainly took one of them from the *Teseide* (without improving it in the process), and not less certainly, and adapted the *Filostrato* in his *Troilus and Cressid*, it is strange that he should refrain from naming the author to whom he was more indebted than to any one other for poetic materials.

But wide and diverse as Chaucer's reading fairly deserves to be called, the love of nature was even stronger and more absorbing in him than the love of books. He has himself, in a very charming passage, compared the strength of the one and of the other of his predilections:—

“And as for me, though I have knowledge slight
In bookës for to read I me delight,
And to them give I faith and full credence,
And in my heart have them in reverence
So heartily, that there is gamë none
That from my bookës maketh me be gone,
But it be seldom on the holiday—
Save, certainly, when that the month of May
Is come, and that I hear the fowlës sing,
And see the flowers as they begin to spring,
Farewell my book, and my devotiön.”

Undoubtedly the literary fashion of Chaucer's times is

responsible for part of this May-morning sentiment, with which he is fond of beginning his poems (the Canterbury pilgrimage is dated towards the end of April—but is not April “messenger to May?”). It had been decreed that flowers should be the badges of nations and dynasties, and the tokens of amorous sentiment; the rose had its votaries, and the lily, lauded by Chaucer’s *Prioress* as the symbol of the Blessed Virgin; while the daisy, which first sprang from the tears of a forlorn damsel, in France gave its name (*marguerite*) to an entire species of courtly verse. The enthusiastic adoration professed by Chaucer, in the *Prologue* to the *Legend of Good Women*, for the daisy, which he afterwards identifies with the good Alceste, the type of faithful wifeness, is, of course, a mere poetical figure. But there is in his use of these favourite literary devices, so to speak, a variety in sameness significant of their accord with his own taste, and of the frank and fresh love of nature which animated him, and which seems to us as much a part of him as his love of books. It is unlikely that his personality will ever become more fully known than it is at present; nor is there anything in respect of which we seem to see so clearly into his inner nature as with regard to these twin predilections, to which he remains true in all his works and in all his moods. While the study of books was his chief passion, nature was his chief joy and solace; while his genius enabled him to transfuse what he read in the former, what came home to him in the latter was akin to that genius itself; for he at times reminds us of his own fresh Canace, whom he describes as looking so full of happiness during her walk through the wood at sunrise:—

“What for the season, what for the morning
And for the fowlës that she heardë sing,

For right anon she wist^ð what they meant
Right by their song, and knew all their intent."

If the above view of Chaucer's character and intellectual tastes and tendencies be in the main correct, there will seem to be nothing paradoxical in describing his literary progress, so far as its *data* are ascertainable, as a most steady and regular one. Very few men awake to find themselves either famous or great of a sudden, and perhaps as few poets as other men, though it may be heresy against a venerable maxim to say so. Chaucer's works form a clearly recognisable series of steps towards the highest achievement of which, under the circumstances in which he lived and wrote, he can be held to have been capable; and his long and arduous self-training, whether consciously or not directed to a particular end, was of that sure kind from which genius itself derives strength. His beginnings as a writer were dictated, partly by the impulse of that imitative faculty which, in poetic natures, is the usual precursor of the creative, partly by the influence of prevailing tastes and the absence of native English literary predecessors whom, considering the circumstances of his life and the nature of his temperament, he could have found it a congenial task to follow. French poems were, accordingly, his earliest models; but fortunately (unlike Gower, whom it is so instructive to compare with Chaucer, precisely because the one lacked that gift of genius which the other possessed) he seems at once to have resolved to make use for his poetical writings of his native speech. In no way, therefore, could he have begun his career with so happy a promise of its future as in that which he actually chose. Nor could any course so naturally have led him to introduce into his poetic diction the French idioms and words already used in the spoken language of Englishmen, more

especially in those classes for which he in the first instance wrote, and thus to confer upon our tongue the great benefit which it owes to him. Again, most fortunately, others had already pointed the way to the selection for literary use of that English dialect which was probably the most suitable for the purpose; and Chaucer, as a Southern man (like his *Parson of a Town*), belonged to a part of the country where the old alliterative verse had long since been discarded for classical and romance forms of versification. Thus the *Romaunt of the Rose* most suitably opens his literary life—a translation in which there is nothing original except an occasional turn of phrase, but in which the translator finds opportunity for exercising his powers of judgment by virtually re-editing the work before him. And already in the *Book of the Duchess*, though most unmistakeably a follower of Machault, he is also the rival of the great French *trouvère*, and has advanced in freedom of movement not less than in agreeableness of form. Then, as his travels extended his acquaintance with foreign literatures to that of Italy, he here found abundant fresh materials from which to feed his productive powers, and more elaborate forms in which to clothe their results; while at the same time comparison, the kindly nurse of originality, more and more enabled him to recast instead of imitating, or encouraged him freely to invent. In *Troilus and Cressid* he produced something very different from a mere condensed translation, and achieved a work in which he showed himself a master of poetic expression and sustained narrative; in the *House of Fame* and the *Assembly of Fowls* he moved with freedom in happily contrived allegories of his own invention; and with the *Legend of Good Women* he had already arrived at a stage when he could undertake to review, under a pleasant pretext, but

with evident consciousness of work done, the list of his previous works. "He hath," he said of himself, "made many a lay and many a thing." Meanwhile the labour incidentally devoted by him to translation from the Latin, or to the composition of prose treatises in the scholastic manner of academical exercises, could but little affect his general literary progress. The mere scholarship of youth, even if it be the reverse of close and profound, is wont to cling to a man through life, and to assert its modest claims at any season; and thus Chaucer's school-learning exercised little influence either of an advancing or of a retarding kind upon the full development of his genius. Nowhere is he so truly himself as in the masterpiece of his last years. For the *Canterbury Tales*, in which he is at once greatest, most original, and most catholic in the choice of materials as well as in moral sympathies, bears the unmistakeable stamp of having formed the crowning labour of his life—a work which death alone prevented him from completing.

It may be said, without presumption, that such a general view as this leaves ample room for all reasonable theories as to the chronology and sequence, where these remain more or less unsettled, of Chaucer's indisputably genuine works. In any case, there is no poet whom, if only as an exercise in critical analysis, it is more interesting to study and re-study in connexion with the circumstances of his literary progress. He still, as has been seen, belongs to the Middle Ages, but to a period in which the noblest ideals of these Middle Ages are already beginning to pale and their mightiest institutions to quake around him; in which learning continues to be in the main scholasticism, the linking of argument with argument, and the accumulation of authority upon authority, and poetry remains to a great extent the crabbedness of clerks or the formality

of courts. Again, Chaucer is mediæval in tricks of style and turns of phrase; he often contents himself with the tritest of figures and the most unrefreshing of ancient devices, and freely resorts to a mixture of names and associations belonging to his own times with others derived from other ages. This want of literary perspective is a sure sign of mediævalism, and one which has amused the world, or has jarred upon it, since the Renaissance taught men to study both classical and Biblical antiquity as realities, and not merely as a succession of pictures or of tapestries on a wall. Chaucer mingles things mediæval and things classical as freely as he brackets King David with the philosopher Seneca, or Judas Iscariot with the Greek "dissimulator" Sinon. His Dido, mounted on a stout palfrey paper-white of hue, with a red-and-gold saddle embroidered and embossed, resembles Alice Perrers in all her pomp rather than the Virgilian queen. Jupiter's eagle, the poet's guide and instructor in the allegory of the *House of Fame*, invokes "Saint Mary, Saint James," and "Saint Clare" all at once; and the pair of lovers at Troy sign their letters "*la vostre T.*" and "*la vostre C.*" Anachronisms of this kind (of the danger of which, by the way, to judge from a passage in the *Prologue* to the *Legend of Good Women*, Chaucer would not appear to have been wholly unconscious) are intrinsically of very slight importance. But the morality of Chaucer's narratives is at times the artificial and overstrained morality of the Middle Ages, which, as it were, clutches hold of a single idea to the exclusion of all others—a morality which, when carried to its extreme consequences, makes monomaniacs as well as martyrs, in both of which species, occasionally, perhaps, combined in the same persons, the Middle Ages abound. The fidelity of Griseldis under the trials imposed

upon her by her, in point of fact, brutal husband is the fidelity of a martyr to unreason. The story was afterwards put on the stage in the Elizabethan age; and though even in the play of *Patient Grissil* (by Chettle and others) it is not easy to reconcile the husband's proceedings with the promptings of common sense, yet the playwrights, with the instinct of their craft, contrived to introduce some element of humanity into his character, and of probability into his conduct. Again, the supra-chivalrous respect paid by Arviragus, the Breton knight of the *Franklin's Tale*, to the sanctity of his wife's word, seriously to the peril of his own and his wife's honour, is an effort to which probably even the Knight of La Mancha himself would have proved unequal. It is not to be expected that Chaucer should have failed to share some of the prejudices of his times as well as to fall in with their ways of thought and sentiment; and though it is the *Prioress* who tells a story against the Jews which passes the legend of Hugh of Lincoln, yet it would be very hazardous to seek any irony in this legend of bigotry. In general, much of that *naïveté* which to modern readers seems Chaucer's most obvious literary quality must be ascribed to the times in which he lived and wrote. This quality is, in truth, by no means that which most deeply impresses itself upon the observation of any one able to compare Chaucer's writings with those of his more immediate predecessors and successors. But the sense in which the term *naïf* should be understood in literary criticism is so imperfectly agreed upon among us, that we have not yet even found an English equivalent for the word.

To Chaucer's times, then, belongs much of what may at first sight seem to include itself among the characteristics of his genius; while, on the other hand, there are to be

distinguished from these the influences due to his training and studies in two literatures—the French and the Italian. In the former of these he must have felt at home, if not by birth and descent, at all events by social connexion, habits of life, and ways of thought; while in the latter he, whose own country's was still a half-fledged literary life, found ready to his hand masterpieces of artistic maturity lofty in conception, broad in bearing, finished in form. There still remain, for summary review, the elements proper to his own poetic individuality—those which mark him out not only as the first great poet of his own nation, but as a great poet for all times.

The poet must please; if he wishes to be successful and popular, he must suit himself to the tastes of his public; and even if he be indifferent to immediate fame, he must, as belonging to one of the most impressionable, the most receptive species of humankind, live, in a sense, *with* and *for* his generation. To meet this demand upon his genius, Chaucer was born with many gifts which he carefully and assiduously exercised in a long series of poetical experiments, and which he was able felicitously to combine for the achievement of results unprecedented in our literature. In readiness of descriptive power, in brightness and variety of imagery, and in flow of diction, Chaucer remained unequalled by any English poet, till he was surpassed—it seems not too much to say, in all three respects—by Spenser. His verse, where it suits his purpose, glitters, to use Dunbar's expression, as with fresh enamel, and its hues are variegated like those of a Flemish tapestry. Even where his descriptive enumerations seem at first sight monotonous or perfunctory, they are, in truth, graphic and true in their details, as in the list of birds in the *Assembly of Nouns*, quoted in part on an earlier page of this essay,

and in the shorter list of trees in the same poem, which is, however, in its general features, imitated from Boccaccio. Neither King James I. of Scotland, nor Spenser, who after Chaucer essayed similar *tours de force*, were happier than he had been before them. Or we may refer to the description of the preparations for the tournament and of the tournament itself in the *Knight's Tale*, or to the thoroughly Dutch picture of a disturbance in a farm-yard in the *Nun's Priest's*. The vividness with which Chaucer describes scenes and events as if he had them before his own eyes, was no doubt, in the first instance, a result of his own imaginative temperament; but one would probably not go wrong in attributing the fulness of the use which he made of this gift to the influence of his Italian studies—more especially to those which led him to Dante, whose multitudinous characters and scenes impress themselves with so singular and immediate a definiteness upon the imagination. At the same time, Chaucer's resources seem inexhaustible for filling up or rounding off his narratives with the aid of chivalrous love or religious legend, by the introduction of samples of scholastic discourse or devices of personal or general allegory. He commands, where necessary, a rhetorician's readiness of illustration, and a masque-writer's inventiveness, as to machinery; he can even (in the *House of Fame*) conjure up an elaborate but self-consistent phantasmagory of his own, and continue it with a fulness proving that his fancy would not be at a loss for supplying even more materials than he cares to employ.

But Chaucer's poetry derived its power to please from yet another quality; and in this he was the first of our English poets to emulate the poets of the two literatures to which, in the matter of his productions and in the or-

naments of his diction, he owed so much. There is in his verse a music which hardly ever wholly loses itself, and which at times is as sweet as that in any English poet after him.

This assertion is not one which is likely to be gainsaid at the present day, when there is not a single lover of Chaucer who would sit down contented with Dryden's condescending mixture of censure and praise. "The verse of Chaucer," he wrote, "I confess, is not harmonious to us. They who lived with him, and some time after him, thought it musical; and it continues so, even in our judgment, if compared with the numbers of Lydgate and Gower, his contemporaries: there is a rude sweetness of a Scotch tune in it, which is natural and pleasing, though not perfect." At the same time, it is no doubt necessary, in order to verify the correctness of a less balanced judgment, to take the trouble, which, if it could but be believed, is by no means great, to master the rules and usages of Chaucerian versification. These rules and usages the present is not a fit occasion for seeking to explain.¹

¹ It may, however, be stated that they only partially connect themselves with Chaucer's use of forms which are now obsolete—more especially of inflexions of verbs and substantives (including several instances of the famous final *e*), and contractions with the negative *ne* and other monosyllabic words ending in a vowel, of the initial syllables of words beginning with vowels or with the letter *h*. These and other variations from later usage in spelling and pronunciation—such as the occurrence of an *e* (sometimes sounded and sometimes not) at the end of words in which it is now no longer retained, and, again, the frequent accentuation of many words of French origin in their last syllable, as in French, and of certain words of English origin analogously—are to be looked for as a matter of course in a last writing in the period of our language in which Chaucer lived. He clearly foresaw the difficulties which would be caused to his readers by the variations of usage in spelling and pronunciation—variations

With regard to the most important of them, is it not too much to say that instinct and experience will very to some extent rendered inevitable by the fact that he wrote in an English dialect which was only gradually coming to be accepted as the uniform language of English writers. Towards the close of his *Troilus and Cressid* he thus addresses his "little book," in fear of the mangling it might undergo from scribes who might blunder in the copying of its words, or from reciters who might maltreat its verse in the distribution of the accents:—

"And, since there is so great diversity
In English, and in writing of our tongue,
I pray to God that none may miswrite thee
Nor thee mismetre, for default of tongue,
And wheresoe'er thou mayst be read or sung,
That thou be understood, God I beseech."

But in his versification he likewise adopted certain other practices which had no such origin or reason as those already referred to. Among them were the addition, at the end of a line of five accents, of an unaccented syllable; and the substitution, for the first foot of a line either of four or of five accents, of a single syllable. These deviations from a stricter system of versification he doubtless permitted to himself, partly for the sake of variety, and partly for that of convenience; but neither of them is peculiar to himself, or of supreme importance for the effect of his verse. In fact, he seems to allow as much in a passage of his *House of Fame*—a poem written, it should, however, be observed, in an easy-going form of verse (the line of four accents) which in his later period Chaucer seems, with this exception, to have invariably discarded. He here beseeches Apollo to make his rhyme

"... Somewhat agreeable,
Though some verse fail in a syllable."

But another of his usages—the misunderstanding of which has more than anything else caused his art as a writer of verse to be misjudged—seems to have been due to a very different cause. To understand the real nature of the usage in question it is only necessary to seize the principle of Chaucer's rhythm. Of this principle it was well said many years ago by a most competent authority—Mr. R. Horne—that

speedily combine to indicate to an intelligent reader where the poet has resorted to it. *Without* intelligence on the part of the reader, the beautiful harmonies of Mr. Tennyson's later verse remain obscure; so that, taken in this way, the most musical of English verse may seem as difficult to read as the most rugged; but in the former case the lesson is learnt not to be lost again; in the latter, the tumbling is ever beginning anew, as with the rock of Sisyphus. There is nothing that can fairly be called rugged in the verse of Chaucer.

And, fortunately, there are not many pages in this poet's works devoid of lines or passages the music of which cannot escape any ear, however unaccustomed it may be to his diction and versification. What is the nature of the art at whose bidding ten monosyllables arrange themselves into a line of the exquisite cadence of the following:—

“And she was fair, as is the rose in May?”

Nor would it be easy to find lines surpassing in their melancholy charm Chaucer's version of the lament of Medea when deserted by Jason—a passage which makes the reader

it is “inseparable from a full or fair exercise of the genius of our language in versification.” For though this usage in its full freedom was gradually again lost to our poetry for a time, yet it was in a large measure recovered by Shakspeare and the later dramatists of our great age, and has since been never altogether abandoned again—not even by the correct writers of the Augustan period—till by the favourites of our own times it is resorted to with a perhaps excessive liberality. It consists simply in *slurring* over certain final syllables—not eliding them or contracting them with the syllables following upon them, but passing over them lightly, so that, without being inaudible, they may at the same time not interfere with the rhythm or beat of the verse. This usage, by adding to the variety, incontestably adds to the flexibility and beauty of Chaucer's versification.

neglectful of the English poet's modest hint that the letter of the Colchian princess may be found at full length in Ovid. The lines shall be quoted *verbatim*, though not *literatim*; and perhaps no better example, and none more readily appreciable by a modern ear, could be given than the fourth of them of the harmonious effect of Chaucer's usage of *slurring*, referred to above:—

“Why likèd thee my yellow hair to see
More than the boundës of mine honesty?
Why likèd me thy youth and thy fairnéss
And of thy tongue the infinite graciousness?
O, had'st thou in thy conquest dead y-bee(n),
Full myckle untruth had there died with thee.”

Qualities and powers such as the above have belonged to poets of very various times and countries before and after Chaucer. But in addition to these he most assuredly possessed others, which are not usual among the poets of our nation, and which, whencesoever they had come to him personally, had not, before they made their appearance in him, seemed indigenous to the English soil. It would, indeed, be easy to misrepresent the history of English poetry, during the period which Chaucer's advent may be said to have closed, by ascribing to it a uniformly solemn and serious, or even dark and gloomy, character. Such a description would not apply to the poetry of the period before the Norman Conquest, though, in truth, little room could be left for the play of fancy or wit in the hammered-out war-song, or in the long-drawn Scriptural paraphrase. Nor was it likely that a contagious gaiety should find an opportunity of manifesting itself in the course of the versification of grave historical chronicles, or in the tranquil objective reproduction of the endless traditions of British legend. Of the popular songs belonging to the period

after the Norman Conquest, the remains which furnish us with direct or indirect evidence concerning them hardly enable us to form an opinion. But we know that (the cavilling spirit of Chaucer's burlesque *Rhyme of Sir Thopas* notwithstanding) the efforts of English metrical romance in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries were neither few nor feeble, although these romances were chiefly translations, sometimes abridgments to boot—even the Arthurian cycle having been only imported across the Channel, though it may have thus come back to its original home. There is some animation in at least one famous chronicle in verse, dating from about the close of the thirteenth century; there is real spirit in the war-songs of Minot in the middle of the fourteenth; and from about its beginnings dates a satire full of broad fun concerning the jolly life led by the monks. But none of these works or of those contemporary with them show that innate lightness and buoyancy of tone which seems to add wings to the art of poetry. Nowhere had the English mind found so real an opportunity of poetic utterance in the days of Chaucer's own youth as in Langland's unique work, national in its allegorical form and in its alliterative metre; and nowhere had this utterance been more stern and severe.

No sooner, however, has Chaucer made his appearance as a poet, than he seems to show what mistress's badge he wears, which party of the two that have at most times divided among them a national literature and its representatives he intends to follow. The burden of his song is "Si douce est la marguérite:" he has learnt the ways of French gallantry as if to the manner born, and thus becomes, as it were without hesitation or effort, the first English love-poet. Nor—though in the course of his

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career his range of themes, his command of materials, and his choice of forms are widely enlarged—is the gay banner under which he has ranged himself ever deserted by him. With the exception of the *House of Fame*, there is not one of his longer poems of which the passion of love, under one or another of its aspects, does not either constitute the main subject or (as in the *Canterbury Tales*) furnish the greater part of the contents. It is as a love-poet that Gower thinks of Chaucer when paying a tribute to him in his own verse; it is to the attacks made upon him in his character as a love-poet, and to his consciousness of what he has achieved as such, that he gives expression in the *Prologue* to the *Legend of Good Women*, where his fair advocate tells the God of Love:—

“The man hath servèd you of his cunning,
And furthered well your law in his writing,
All be it that he cannot well indite,
Yet hath he made unlearnèd folk delight
To servè you in praising of your name.”

And so he resumes his favourite theme once more, to tell, as the *Man of Law* says, “of lovers up and down, more than Ovid makes mention of in his old *Epistles*.” This fact alone—that our first great English poet was also our first English love-poet, properly so called—would have sufficed to transform our poetic literature through his agency.

What, however, calls for special notice, in connexion with Chaucer's special poetic quality of gaiety and brightness, is the preference which he exhibits for treating the joyous aspects of this many-sided passion. Apart from the *Legend of Good Women*, which is specially designed to give brilliant examples of the faithfulness of women under circumstances of trial, pain, and grief, and from two or



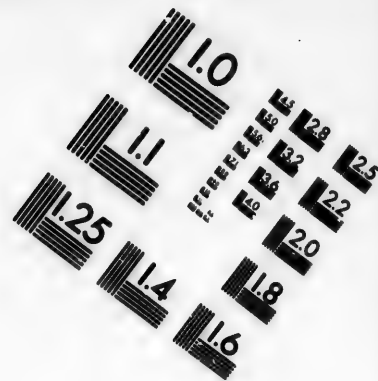
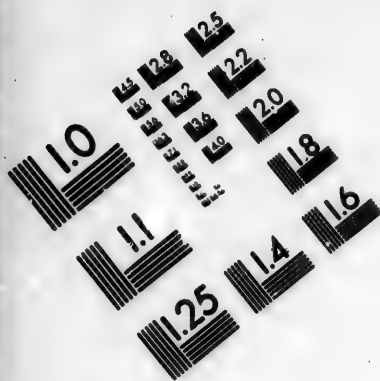
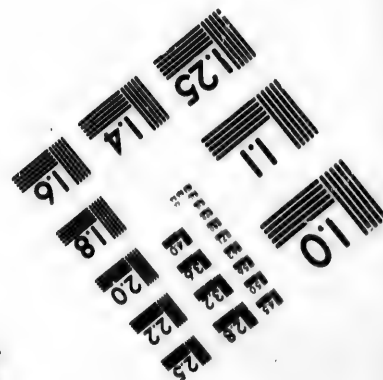
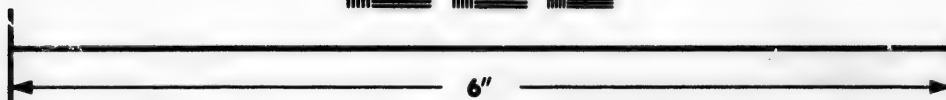
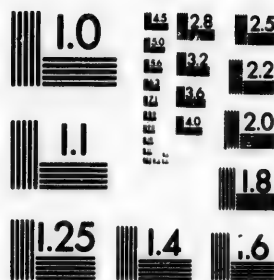


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three of the *Canterbury Tales*, he dwells, with consistent preference, on the bright side of love, though remaining a stranger to its divine radiance, which shines forth so fully upon us out of the pages of Spenser. Thus, in the *Assembly of Fowls* all is gaiety and mirth, as indeed beseems the genial neighbourhood of Cupid's temple. Again, in *Troilus and Cressid*, the earlier and cheerful part of the love-story is that which he develops with unmistakeable sympathy and enjoyment; and in his hands this part of the poem becomes one of the most charming poetic narratives of the birth and growth of young love which our literature possesses—a soft and sweet counterpart to the consuming heat of Marlowe's unrivalled *Hero and Leander*. With *Troilus* it was love at first sight—with *Cressid* a passion of very gradual growth. But so full of nature is the narrative of this growth, that one is irresistibly reminded at more than one point of the inimitable creations of the great modern master in the description of women's love. Is there not a touch of Gretchen in *Cressid*, retiring into her chamber to ponder over the first revelation to her of the love of *Troilus*?—

“Cressid arose, no longer there she stayed,
But straight into her closet went anon,
And set her down, as still as any stone,
And every word gan up and down to wind,
That he had said, as it came to her mind.”

And is there not a touch of Clärchen in her—though with a difference—when from her casement she blushing beholds her lover riding past in triumph:

“So like a man of armés and a knight
He was to see, filled full of high prowés,
For both he had a body, and a might

To do that thing, as well as hardiness ;
And eke to see him in his gear him dress,
So fresh, so young, so wieldly seemèd he,
It truly was a heaven him for to see.

" His helm was hewn about in twenty places,
That by a tissue hung his back behind ;
His shield was dashed with strokes of swords and maces,
In which men mightè many an arrow find
That piercèd had the horn and nerve and rind ;
And aye the people cried : ' Here comes our joy,
And, next his brother, holder up of Troy.' "

Even in the very *Book of the Duchess*, the widowed lover describes the maiden charms of his lost wife with so lively a freshness as almost to make one forget that it is a *lost* wife whose praises are being recorded.

The vivacity and joyousness of Chaucer's poetic temperament, however, show themselves in various other ways besides his favourite manner of treating a favourite theme. They enhance the spirit of his passages of dialogue, and add force and freshness to his passages of description. They make him amusingly impatient of epical lengths, abrupt in his transitions, and anxious, with an anxiety usually manifested by readers rather than by writers, to come to the point, " to the great effect," as he is wont to call it. " Men," he says, " may overlade a ship or barge, and therefore I will skip at once to the effect, and let all the rest slip." And he unconsciously suggests a striking difference between himself and the great Elizabethan epic poet who owes so much to him, when he declines to make as long a tale of the chaff or of the straw as of the corn, and to describe all the details of a marriage-feast *seriatim* :

" The fruit of every tale is for to say :
They eat and drink, and dance and sing and play."

This may be the fruit; but epic poets, from Homer downwards, have been generally in the habit of not neglecting the foliage. Spenser, in particular, has that impartial copiousness which we think it our duty to admire in the Ionic epos, but which, if the truth were told, has prevented generations of Englishmen from acquiring an intimate personal acquaintance with the *Fairy Queen*. With Chaucer the danger certainly rather lay in an opposite direction. Most assuredly he can tell a story with admirable point and precision, when he wishes to do so. Perhaps no better example of his skill in this respect could be cited than the *Manciple's Tale*, with its rapid narrative, its major and minor catastrophe, and its concise moral, ending thus:—

“My son, beware, and be no author new
Of tidings, whether they be false or true;
Whereso thou comest, among high or low,
Keep well thy tongue, and think upon the crow.”

At the same time, his frequently recurring announcements of his desire to be brief have the effect of making his narrative appear to halt, and thus, unfortunately, defeat their own purpose. An example of this may be found in the *Knight's Tale*, a narrative poem of which, in contrast with its beauties, a want of evenness is one of the chief defects. It is not that the desire to suppress redundancies is a tendency deserving anything but commendation in any writer, whether great or small; but rather, that the art of concealing art had not yet dawned upon Chaucer. And yet few writers of any time have taken a more evident pleasure in the process of literary production, and have more visibly overflowed with sympathy for, or antipathy against, the characters of their own creation. Great novelists of our own age have often told their readers, in prefaces to

their fictions or in *quasi*-confidential comments upon them, of the intimacy in which they have lived with the offspring of their own brain, to them far from shadowy beings. But only the *naïveté* of Chaucer's literary age, together with the vivacity of his manner of thought and writing, could place him in so close a personal relation towards the personages and the incidents of his poems. He is overcome by "pity and ruth" as he reads of suffering, and his eyes "wax foul and sore" as he prepares to tell of its infliction. He compassionates "love's servants" as if he were their own "brother dear;" and into his adaptation of the eventful story of Constance (the *Man of Law's Tale*) he introduces apostrophe upon apostrophe, to the defenceless condition of his heroine—to her relentless enemy the Sultana, and to Satan, who ever makes his instrument of women "when he will beguile"—to the drunken messenger who allowed the letter carried by him to be stolen from him—and to the treacherous Queen-mother who caused them to be stolen. Indeed, in addressing the last-named personage, the poet seems to lose all control over himself.

"O Domegild, I have no English digne
Unto thy malice and thy tyranny:
And therefore to the fiend I thee resign,
Let him at length tell of thy treachery.
Fye, mannish, fye!—Oh nay, by God, I lie;
Fye fiendish spirit, for I dare well tell,
Though thou here walk, thy spirit is in hell."

At the opening of the *Legend of Ariadne* he bids Minos redden with shame; and towards its close, when narrating how Theseus sailed away, leaving his true-love behind, he expresses a hope that the wind may drive the traitor "a twenty devil way." Nor does this vivacity find a less

amusing expression in so trifling a touch as that in the *Clerk's Tale*, where the domestic sent to deprive Griseldis of her boy becomes, *eo ipso* as it were, "this ugly sergeant."

Closely allied to Chaucer's liveliness and gaiety of disposition, and in part springing from them, are his keen sense of the ridiculous and the power of satire which he has at his command. His humour has many varieties, ranging from the refined and half-melancholy irony of the *House of Fame* to the ready wit of the sagacious uncle of Cressid, the burlesque fun of the inimitable *Nun's Priest's Tale*, and the very gross salt of the *Reeve*, the *Miller*, and one or two others. The springs of humour often capriciously refuse to allow themselves to be discovered; nor is the satire of which the direct intention is transparent invariably the most effective species of satire. Concerning, however, Chaucer's use of the power which he in so large a measure possessed, viz., that of covering with ridicule the palpable vices or weaknesses of the classes or kinds of men represented by some of his character-types, one assertion may be made with tolerable safety. Whatever may have been the first stimulus and the ultimate scope of the wit and humour which he here expended, they are *not* to be explained as moral indignation in disguise. And in truth Chaucer's merriment flows spontaneously from a source very near the surface; he is so extremely diverting, because he is so extremely diverted himself.

Herein, too, lies the harmlessness of Chaucer's fun. Its harmlessness, to wit, for those who are able to read him in something like the spirit in which he wrote—never a very easy achievement with regard to any author, and one which the beginner and the young had better be advised to abstain from attempting with Chaucer in the overflow of his more or less unrestrained moods. At all events,

the excuse of gaiety of heart—the plea of that *vieil esprit Gaulois* which is so often, and very rarely without need, invoked in an exculpatory capacity by modern French criticism—is the best defence ever made for Chaucer's laughable irregularities, either by his apologists or by himself. "Men should not," he says, and says very truly, "make earnest of game." But when he audaciously defends himself against the charge of impropriety by declaring that he must tell stories *in character*, and coolly requests any person who may find anything in one of his tales objectionable to turn to another:—

"For he shall find enough, both great and small,
Of storial thing that toucheth gentleness,
Likewise morality and holiness;
Blame ye not me, if ye should choose amiss—"

we are constrained to shake our heads at the transparent sophistry of the plea, which requires no exposure. For Chaucer knew very well how to give life and colour to his page without recklessly disregarding bounds the neglect of which was even in his day offensive to many besides the "*precious folk*" of whom he half derisively pretends to stand in awe. In one instance he defeated his own purpose; for the so-called *Cook's Tale of Gamelyn* was substituted by some earlier editor for the original *Cook's Tale*, which has thus in its completed form become a rarity removed beyond the reach of even the most ardent of curiosity hunters. Fortunately, however, Chaucer spoke the truth when he said that from this point of view he had written very differently at different times; no whiter pages remain than many of his.

But the realism of Chaucer is something more than exuberant love of fun and light-hearted gaiety. He is the first great painter of character, because he is the first great

observer of it among modern European writers. His power of comic observation need not be dwelt upon again, after the illustrations of it which have been incidentally furnished in these pages. More especially with regard to the manners and ways of women, which often, while seeming so natural to women themselves, appear so odd to male observers, Chaucer's eye was ever on the alert. But his works likewise contain passages displaying a penetrating insight into the minds of men, as well as a keen eye for their manners, together with a power of generalising, which, when kept within due bounds, lies at the root of the wise knowledge of humankind so admirable to us in our great essayists, from Bacon to Addison and his modern successors. How truly, for instance, in *Troilus and Criseid*, Chaucer observes on the enthusiastic belief of converts, the "strongest-faithed" of men, as he understands! And how fine is the saying as to the suspiciousness characteristic of lewd (*i. e.*, ignorant) people, that to things which are made more subtly

"Than they can in their lewdness comprehend,"

they gladly give the worst interpretation which suggests itself! How appositely the *Canon's Yeoman* describes the arrogance of those who are too clever by half; "when a man has an over-great wit," he says, "it very often chances to him to misuse it!" And with how ripe a wisdom, combined with ethics of true gentleness, the honest *Franklin*, at the opening of his *Tale*, discourses on the uses and the beauty of long-suffering:—

"For one thing, sirës, safely dare I say,
That friends the one the other must obey,
If they will longë holdë company.
Love will not be constrain'd by mastery.

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When mastery comes, the god of love anon
Beateth his wings—and, farewell! he is gone.
Love is a thing as any spirit free.
Women desire, by nature, liberty,
And not to be constrained as a thrall;
And so do men, if I the truth say shall.
Look, who that is most patient in love,
He is at his advantage all above.
A virtue high is patience, certain,
Because it vanquisheth, as clerks explain,
Things to which rigour never could attain.
For every word men should not chide and plain;
Learn ye to suffer, or else, so may I go,
Ye shall it learn, whether ye will or no.
For in this world certain no wight there is
Who neither doth nor saith some time amiss.
Sickness or ire, or constellati3n,
Wine, woe, or changing of complexi3n,
Causeth full oft to do amiss or speak.
For every wrong men may not vengeance wreak:
After a time there must be temperance
With every wight that knows self-governance."

It was by virtue of his power of observing and drawing character, above all, that Chaucer became the true predecessor of two several growths in our literature, in both of which characterisation forms a most important element—it might perhaps be truly said, the element which surpasses all others in importance. From this point of view the dramatic poets of the Elizabethan age remain unequalled by any other school or group of dramatists, and the English novelists of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries by the representatives of any other development of prose-fiction. In the art of construction, in the invention and the arrangement of incident, these dramatists and novelists may have been left behind by others; in the creation of

character they are, on the whole, without rivals in their respective branches of literature. To the earlier at least of these growths Chaucer may be said to have pointed the way. His personages—more especially, of course, as has been seen, those who are assembled together in the *Prologue* to the *Canterbury Tales*—are not mere phantasms of the brain, or even mere actual possibilities, but real human beings, and types true to the likeness of whole classes of men and women, or to the mould in which all human nature is cast. This is, upon the whole, the most wonderful, as it is perhaps the most generally recognised, of Chaucer's gifts. It would not of itself have sufficed to make him a great dramatist, had the drama stood ready for him as a literary form into which to pour the inspirations of his genius, as it afterwards stood ready for our great Elizabethans. But to it were added in him that perception of a strong dramatic situation, and that power of finding the right words for it, which have determined the success of many plays, and the absence of which materially detracts from the completeness of the effect of others, high as their merits may be in other respects. How thrilling, for instance, is that rapid passage across the stage, as one might almost call it, of the unhappy Dorigen in the *Franklin's Tale*! The antecedents of the situation, to be sure, are, as has been elsewhere suggested, absurd enough; but who can fail to feel that spasm of anxious sympathy with which a powerful dramatic situation in itself affects us, when the wife, whom for truth's sake her husband has bidden be untrue to him, goes forth on her unholy errand of duty? "Whither so fast?" asks the lover:

"And she made answer, half as she were mad:
'Unto the garden, as my husband bade,
My promise for to keep, alas! alas!'"

Nor, as the abbreviated prose version of the *Pardoner's Tale* given above will suffice to show, was Chaucer deficient in the art of dramatically arranging a story; while he is not excelled by any of our non-dramatic poets in the spirit and movement of his dialogue. The *Book of the Duchess* and the *House of Fame*, but more especially *Troilus and Cressid* and the connecting passages between some of the *Canterbury Tales*, may be referred to in various illustration of this.

The vividness of his imagination, which conjures up, so to speak, the very personality of his characters before him, and the contagious force of his pathos, which is as true and as spontaneous as his humour, complete in him the born dramatist. We can see Constance as with our own eyes, in the agony of her peril:—

"Have ye not seen some time a pallid face
Among a press, of him that hath been led
Towards his death, where him awaits no grace,
And such a colour in his face hath had,
Men might know his face was so bested
'Mong all the other faces in that rout?
So stands Constânce, and looketh her about."

And perhaps there is no better way of studying the general character of Chaucer's pathos than a comparison of the *Monk's Tale* from which this passage is taken, and the *Clerk's Tale*, with their originals. In the former, for instance, the prayer of Constance, when condemned through Domegild's guilt to be cast adrift once more on the waters, her piteous words and tenderness to her little child as it lies weeping in her arm, and her touching leave-taking from the land of the husband who has condemned her—all these are Chaucer's own. So also are parts of one of the most affecting passages in the *Clerk's Tale*—Griseldis'

farewell to her daughter. But it is as unnecessary to lay a finger upon lines and passages illustrating Chaucer's pathos as upon others illustrating his humour.

Thus, then, Chaucer was a born dramatist; but fate willed it, that the branch of our literature which might probably have of all been the best suited to his genius was not to spring into life till he and several generations after him had passed away. To be sure, during the fourteenth century the so-called miracle-plays flourished abundantly in England, and were, as there is every reason to believe, already largely performed by the trading-companies of London and the towns. The allusions in Chaucer to these beginnings of our English drama are, however, remarkably scanty. The *Wife of Bath* mentions plays of miracles among the other occasions of religious sensation haunted by her, clad in her gay scarlet gown—including vigils, processions, preachings, pilgrimages, and marriages. And the jolly parish-clerk of the *Miller's Tale*, we are informed, at times, in order to show his lightness and his skill, played "Herod on a scaffold high"—thus, by-the-bye, emulating the parish clerks of London, who are known to have been among the performers of miracles in the Middle Ages. The allusion to Pilate's voice in the *Miller's Prologue*, and that in the *Tale* to

"The sorrow of Noah with his fellowship
That he had ere he got his wife to ship,"

seem likewise dramatic reminiscences; and the occurrence of these three allusions in a single *Tale* and its *Prologue* would incline one to think that Chaucer had recently amused himself at one of these performances. But plays are not mentioned among the entertainments enumerated at the opening of the *Pardoner's Tale*; and it would in

any case have been unlikely that Chaucer should have paid much attention to diversions which were long chiefly "visited" by the classes with which he could have no personal connexion, and even at a much later date were dissociated in men's minds from poetry and literature. Had he ever written anything remotely partaking of the nature of a dramatic piece, it could at the most have been the words of the songs in some congratulatory royal pageant such as Lydgate probably wrote on the return of Henry V. after Agincourt; though there is not the least reason for supposing Chaucer to have taken so much interest in the "ridings" through the City which occupied many a morning of the idle apprentice of the *Cook's Tale*, Perkyn Revellour. It is, perhaps, more surprising to find Chaucer, who was a reader of several Latin poets, and who had heard of more, both Latin and Greek, show no knowledge whatever of the ancient classical drama, with which he may accordingly be fairly concluded to have been wholly unacquainted.

To one further aspect of Chaucer's realism as a poet reference has already been made; but a final mention of it may most appropriately conclude this sketch of his poetical characteristics. His descriptions of nature are as true as his sketches of human character; and incidental touches in him reveal his love of the one as unmistakeably as his unflagging interest in the study of the other. Even these May-morning *exordia*, in which he was but following a fashion—faithfully observed both by the French *trouvères* and by the English romances translated from their productions, and not forgotten by the author of the earlier part of the *Roman de la Rose*—always come from his hands with the freshness of natural truth. They cannot be called original in conception, and it would be difficult

to point out in them anything strikingly original in execution; yet they cannot be included among those matter-of-course notices of morning and evening, sunrise and sunset, to which so many poets have accustomed us since (be it said with reverence) Homer himself. In Chaucer these passages make his page "as fresh as is the month of May." When he went forth on these April and May mornings, it was not solely with the intent of composing a roundelay or a *marguérite*; but we may be well assured he allowed the song of the little birds, the perfume of the flowers, and the fresh verdure of the English landscape, to sink into his very soul. For nowhere does he seem, and nowhere could he have been, more open to the influence which he received into himself, and which in his turn he exercised, and exercises upon others, than when he was in fresh contact with nature. In this influence lies the secret of his genius; in his poetry there is *life*.

CHAPTER IV.

EPILOGUE.

THE legacy which Chaucer left to our literature was to fructify in the hands of a long succession of heirs; and it may be said, with little fear of contradiction, that at no time has his fame been fresher and his influence upon our poets—and upon our painters as well as our poets—more perceptible than at the present day. When Gower first put forth his *Confessio Amantis*, we may assume that Chaucer's poetical labours, of the fame of which his brother-poet declared the land to be full, had not yet been crowned by his last and greatest work. As a poet, therefore, Gower in one sense owes less to Chaucer than did many of their successors; though, on the other hand, it may be said with truth that to Chaucer is due the fact that Gower (whose earlier productions were in French and in Latin) ever became a poet at all. The *Confessio Amantis* is no book for all times like the *Canterbury Tales*; but the conjoined names of Chaucer and Gower added strength to one another in the eyes of the generations ensuing, little anxious as these generations were to distinguish which of the pair was really the first to "garnish our English rude" with the flowers of a new poetic diction and art of verse.

The Lancaster period of our history had its days of

national glory as well as of national humiliation, and indisputably, as a whole, advanced the growth of the nation towards political manhood. But it brought with it no golden summer to fulfil the promises of the spring-tide of our modern poetical literature. The two poets whose names stand forth from the barren after-season of the earlier half of the fifteenth century, were, both of them, according to their own profession, disciples of Chaucer. In truth, however, Occleve, the only nameworthy poetical writer of the reign of Henry IV., seems to have been less akin as an author to Chaucer than to Gower, while his principal poem manifestly was, in an even greater degree than the *Confessio Amantis*, a severely learned or, as its author terms it, unbuxom book. Lydgate, on the other hand, the famous monk of Bury, has in him something of the spirit as well as of the manner of Chaucer, under whose advice he is said to have composed one of his principal poems. Though a monk, he was no stay-at-home or do-nothing; like him of the *Canterbury Tales*, we may suppose Lydgate to have scorned the maxim that a monk out of his cloister is like a fish out of water; and doubtless many days which he could spare from the instruction of youth at St. Edmund's Bury were spent about the London streets, of the sights and sounds of which he has left us so vivacious a record—a kind of farcical supplement to the *Prologue* of the *Canterbury Tales*. His literary career, part of which certainly belongs to the reign of Henry V., has some resemblance to Chaucer's, though it is less regular and less consistent with itself; and several of his poems bear more or less distinct traces of Chaucer's influence. The *Troy-book* is not founded on *Troilus and Cressid*, though it is derived from the sources which had fed the original of Chaucer's poem; but the *Temple of Glass* seems

to have been an imitation of the *House of Fame*; and the *Story of Thebes* is actually introduced by its author as an additional *Canterbury Tale*, and challenges comparison with the rest of the series into which it asks admittance. Both Occleve and Lydgate enjoyed the patronage of a prince of genius descended from the House, with whose founder Chaucer was so closely connected — Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester. Meanwhile, the sovereign of a neighbouring kingdom was in all probability himself the agent who established the influence of Chaucer as predominant in the literature of his native land. The long though honourable captivity in England of King James I. of Scotland — the best poet among kings and the best king among poets, as he has been antithetically called — was consoled by the study of the “hymns” of his “dear masters, Chaucer and Gower,” for the happiness of whose souls he prays at the close of his poem, *The King's Quair*. That most charming of love-allegories, in which the Scottish king sings the story of his captivity and of his deliverance by the sweet messenger of love, not only closely imitates Chaucer in detail, more especially at its opening, but is pervaded by his spirit. Many subsequent Scottish poets imitated Chaucer, and some of them loyally acknowledged their debts to him. Gawin Douglas in his *Palace of Honour*, and Henryson in his *Testament of Cressid* and elsewhere, are followers of the Southern master. The wise and brave Sir David Lyndsay was familiar with his writings; and he was not only occasionally imitated, but praised with enthusiastic eloquence by William Dunbar, “that darling of the Scottish Muses,” whose poetical merits Sir Walter Scott, from some points of view, can hardly be said to have exaggerated, when declaring him to have been “justly raised to a level with Chaucer by every judge of poetry,

to whom his obsolete language has not rendered him unintelligible." Dunbar knew that this Scottish language was but a form of that which, as he declared, Chaucer had made to "surmount every terrestrial tongue, as far as midnight is surmounted by a May morning."

Meanwhile, in England, the influence of Chaucer continued to live even during the dreary interval which separates from one another two important epochs of our literary history. Now, as in the days of the Norman kings, ballads orally transmitted were the people's poetry; and one of these popular ballads carried the story of *Patient Grissel* into regions where Chaucer's name was probably unknown. When, after the close of the troubled season of the Roses, our poetic literature showed the first signs of a revival, they consisted in a return to the old masters of the fourteenth century. The poetry of Hawes, the learned author of the crabbed *Pastime of Pleasure*, exhibits an undeniable continuity with that of Chaucer, Gower, and Lydgate, to which triad he devotes a chapter of panegyric. Hawes, however, presses into the service of his allegory not only all the Virtues and all the Vices, whom from habit we can tolerate in such productions, but also Astronomy, Geometry, Arithmetic, and the rest of the seven Daughters of Doctrine, whom we *cannot*, and is altogether inferior to the least of his models. It is, at the same time, to his credit that he seems painfully aware of his inability to cope with either Chaucer or Lydgate as to vigour of invention. There is, in truth, more of the dramatic spirit of Chaucer in Barklay's *Ship of Fools*, which, though essentially a translation, achieved in England the popularity of an original work; for this poem, like the *Canterbury Tales*, introduces into its admirable framework a variety of lifelike sketches of character and manners—it has in it that dramatic element

which is so Chaucerian a characteristic. But the aim of its author was didactic, which Chaucer's had never been.

When with the poems of Surrey and Wyatt, and with the first attempts in the direction of the regular drama, the opening of the second great age in our literature approached, and when, about half a century afterwards, that age actually opened with an unequalled burst of varied productivity, it would seem as if Chaucer's influence might naturally enough have passed away, or at least become obscured. Such was not, however the case, and Chaucer survived into the age of the English Renaissance as an established English classic, in which capacity Caxton had honoured him by twice issuing an edition of his works from the Westminster printing-press. Henry VIII.'s favourite—the reckless but pithy satirist, Skelton—was alive to the merits of his great predecessor; and Skelton's patron, William Thynne, a royal official, busied himself with editing Chaucer's works. The loyal servant of Queen Mary, the wise and witty John Heywood, from whose *Interludes* the step is so short to the first regular English comedy, in one of these pieces freely plagiarised a passage in the *Canterbury Tales*. Tottel, the printer of the favourite poetic *Miscellany* published shortly before Queen Elizabeth's accession, included in his collection the beautiful lines, cited above, called *Good Counsel of Chaucer*. And when at last the Elizabethan era properly so-called began, the proof was speedily given that geniuses worthy of holding fellowship with Chaucer had assimilated into their own literary growth what was congruous to it in his, just as he had assimilated to himself—not always improving, but hardly ever merely borrowing or taking over—much that he had found in the French *trouvères*, and in Italian poetry and prose. The first work which can be included in the great period of Eliza-

bethan literature is the *Shepherd's Calendar*, where Spenser is still in a partly imitative stage; and it is Chaucer whom he imitates and extols in his poem, and whom his *alter ego*, the mysterious "*E. K.*," extols in preface and notes. The longest of the passages in which reference is made by Spenser to Chaucer, under the pseudonym of Tityrus, is more especially noteworthy, both as showing the veneration of the younger for the older poet, and as testifying to the growing popularity of Chaucer at the time when Spenser wrote.

The same great poet's debt to his revered predecessor in the *Daphnida* has been already mentioned. The *Fairy Queen* is the masterpiece of an original mind, and its supreme poetic quality is a lofty magnificence upon the whole foreign to Chaucer's genius; but Spenser owed something more than his archaic forms to "Tityrus," with whose style he had erst disclaimed all ambition to match his pastoral pipe. In a well-known passage of his great epos he declares that it is through sweet infusion of the older poet's own spirit that he, the younger, follows the footing of his feet, in order so the rather to meet with his meaning. It was this, the romantic spirit proper, which Spenser sought to catch from Chaucer, but which, like all those who consciously seek after it, he transmuted into a new quality and a new power. With Spenser the change was into something mightier and loftier. He would, we cannot doubt, readily have echoed the judgment of his friend and brother-poet concerning Chaucer. "I know not," writes Sir Philip Sidney, "whether to marvel more, either that he in that misty time could see so clearly, or that we, in this clear age, walk so stumblingly after him. Yet had he," adds Sidney, with the generosity of a true critic, who is not lost in wonder at his own cleverness in

discovering defects, "great wants, fit to be forgiven in so reverent an antiquity." And yet a third Elizabethan, Michael Drayton, pure of tone and high of purpose, joins his voice to those of Spenser and Sidney, hailing in the "noble Chaucer"

". . . The first of those that ever brake
Into the Muses' treasure and first spake
In weighty numbers,"

and placing Gower, with a degree of judgment not reached by his and Chaucer's immediate successors, in his proper relation of poetic rank to his younger but greater contemporary.

To these names should be added that of George Puttenham—if he was indeed the author of the grave and elaborate treatise, dedicated to Lord Burghley, on *The Art of English Poësy*. In this work mention is repeatedly made of Chaucer, "father of our English poets;" and his learning, and "the natural of his pleasant wit," are alike judiciously commended. One of Puttenham's best qualities as a critic is that he never speaks without his book; and he comes very near to discovering Chaucer's greatest gift when noticing his excellence in *prosopographia*—a term which to Chaucer would, perhaps, have seemed to require translation. At the obsolescence of Chaucer's own diction this critic, who writes entirely "for the better brought-up sort," is obliged to shake his learned head.

Enough has been said in the preceding pages to support the opinion that among the wants which fell to the lot of Chaucer as a poet, perhaps the greatest (though Sidney would never have allowed this) was the want of poetic form most in harmony with his most characteristic gifts. The influence of Chaucer upon the dramatists of the Elizabethan age was probably rather indirect and general than

direct and personal; but indications or illustrations of it may be traced in a considerable number of these writers, including, perhaps, among the earliest Richard Edwards as the author of a non-extant tragedy, *Palamon and Arcite*, and among the latest the author—or authors—of *The Two Noble Kinsmen*. Besides Fletcher and Shakspeare, Greene, Nash, and Middleton, and more especially Jonson (as both poet and grammarian), were acquainted with Chaucer's writings; so that it is perhaps rather a proof of the widespread popularity of the *Canterbury Tales* than the reverse that they were not largely resorted to for materials by the Elizabethan and Jacobean dramatists. Under Charles I. *Troilus and Cressid* found a translator in Sir Francis Kynaston, whom Cartwright congratulated on having made it possible "that we read Chaucer now without a dictionary." A personage, however, in Cartwright's best known play, the *Antiquary Moth*, prefers to talk on his own account "genuine" Chaucerian English.

To pursue the further traces of the influence of Chaucer through such a literary aftergrowth as the younger Fletchers, into the early poems of Milton, would be beyond the purpose of the present essay. In the treasure-house of that great poet's mind were gathered memories and associations innumerable, though the sublimest flights of his genius soared aloft into regions whither the imagination of none of our earlier poets had preceded them. On the other hand, the days have passed for attention to be spared for the treatment experienced by Chaucer in the Augustan age, to which he was a barbarian only to be tolerated if put into the court-dress of the final period of civilisation. Still, even thus, he was not left altogether unread; nor was he in all cases adapted without a certain measure of success. The irrepressible

vigour, and the frequent felicity, of Dryden's *Fables* contrast advantageously with the tame evenness of the *Temple of Fame*, an early effort by Pope, who had wit enough to imitate in a juvenile parody some of the grossest peculiarities of Chaucer's manner, but who would have been quite ashamed to reproduce him in a serious literary performance, without the inevitable polish and cadence of his own style of verse. Later modernisations—even of those which a band of poets in some instances singularly qualified for the task put forth in a collection published in the year 1841, and which, on the part of some of them at least, was the result of conscientious endeavour—it is needless to characterise here. Slight incidental use has been made of some of these in this essay, the author of which would gladly have abstained from printing a single modernised phrase or word—most of all, any which he has himself been guilty of re-casting. The time cannot be far distant when even the least unsuccessful of such attempts will no longer be accepted, because no such attempts whatever will be any longer required. No Englishman or Englishwoman need go through a very long or very laborious apprenticeship in order to become able to read, understand, and enjoy what Chaucer himself wrote. But if this apprenticeship be too hard, then some sort of makeshift must be accepted, or antiquity must remain the “canker-worm” even of a great national poet, as Spenser said it had already in his day proved to be of Chaucer.

Meanwhile, since our poetic literature has long thrown off the shackles which forced it to adhere to one particular group of models, he is not a true English poet who should remain uninfluenced by any of the really great among his predecessors. If Chaucer has again, in a special sense, become the “master dear and father reverent” of

some of our living poets, in a wider sense he must hold this relation to them all and to all their successors, so long as he continues to be known and understood. As it is, there are few worthies of our literature whose names seem to awaken throughout the English-speaking world a reader sentiment of familiar regard; and in New England, where the earliest great poet of Old England is cherished not less warmly than among ourselves, a kindly cunning has thus limned his likeness:—

“An old man in a lodge within a park;
The chamber walls depicted all around
With portraiture of huntsman, hawk and hound,
And the hurt deer. He listeneth to the lark,
Whose song comes with the sunshine through the dark
Of painted glass in leaden lattice bound;
He listeneth and he laugheth at the sound,
Then writeth in a book like any clerk.
He is the poet of the dawn, who wrote
The Canterbury Tales, and his old age
Made beautiful with song; and as I read
I hear the crowing cock, I hear the note
Of lark and linnet, and from every page
Rise odours of ploughed field or flowery mead.”

GLOSSARY.

Bencite = benedicite.

Clepe, call.

Deem, judge.

Despitous, angry to excess.

Digne, nt;—disdainful.

Frere, friar.

Gentle, well-born.

Keep, care.

Languor, grief.

Meinie, following, household.

Meet, mate (?), measure (?).

Overthwart, across.

Parage, rank, degree.

Press, crowd.

Rede, advise, counsel.

Reeve, steward, bailiff.

Ruth, pity.

Scall, scab.

Shapely, fit.

Sithe, time.

Spiced, nice, scrupulous.

Targe, target, shield.

Y prefix of past participle as in

y-bee = *bee(n)*.

While, time; *to quite his while*, to reward his pains.

Wieldy, active.

Wone, custom, habit.

* * A dotted ö should always be sounded in reading.

THE END.

LAMB

BY

ALFRED AINGER

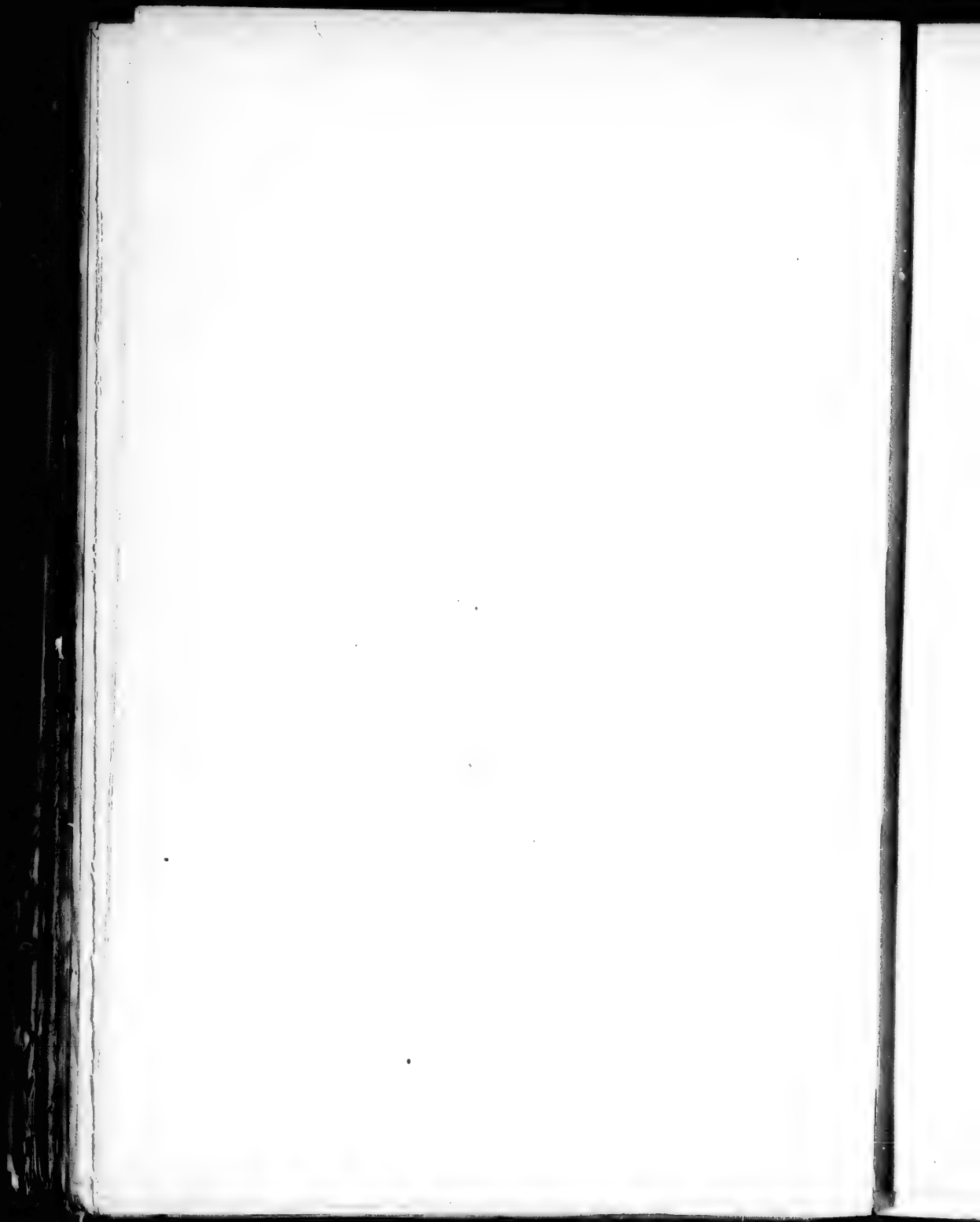
PREFATORY NOTE.

THE writings of Charles Lamb abound in biographical matter. To them, and to the well-known volumes of the late Mr. Justice Talfourd, I am mainly indebted for the material of which this memoir is composed.

I have added a complete list of the chief works from which information about Lamb and his sister has been obtained. I have also had the advantage of communication with those who were personally acquainted with Lamb, and have received from others valuable assistance in exploring less known sources of information.

Among those to whom my acknowledgments for much kindness are due, I would mention Mrs. Arthur Tween, a daughter of that old and loyal friend of the Lamb family, Mr. Randal Norris; Mr. James Crossley, of Manchester; Mr. Edward FitzGerald; Mr. W. Aldis Wright; and last, not least, my friend Mr. J. E. Davis, of the Middle Temple, whose kind interest in this little book has been unfailing.

A. A.



AUTHORITIES CONSULTED.

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CHARLES LAMB.

CHAPTER I.

BOYHOOD.—THE TEMPLE AND CHRIST'S HOSPITAL.

[1775-1789.]

"I WAS born and passed the first seven years of my life in the Temple. Its church, its halls, its gardens, its fountain, its river, I had almost said—for in those young years what was this king of rivers to me but a stream that watered our pleasant places?—these are of my oldest recollections." In this manner does Charles Lamb, in an essay that is one of the masterpieces of English prose, open for us those passages of autobiography which happily abound in his writings. The words do more than fix places and dates. They strike the key in which his early life was set—and the later life, hardly less. The genius of Lamb was surely guided into its special channel by the chance that the first fourteen years of his life were passed, as has been said, "between cloister and cloister," between the mediæval atmosphere of the quiet Temple and that of the busy school of Edward VI.

Charles Lamb was born on the 10th of February, 1775, in Crown Office Row in the Temple, the line of buildings

facing the garden and the river he has so lovingly commemorated. His father, John Lamb, who had come up a country boy from Lincolnshire to seek his fortune in the great city, was clerk and servant to Mr. Samuel Salt, a Bencher of the Inner Temple. He had married Elizabeth Field, whose mother was for more than fifty years house-keeper at the old mansion of the Plumers, Blakesware in Hertfordshire, the Blakesmoor of the *Essays of Elia*. The issue of this marriage was a family of seven children, only three of whom seem to have survived their early childhood. The registers of the Temple Church record the baptisms of all the seven children, ranging from the year 1762 to 1775. Of the three who lived Charles was the youngest. The other two were his brother John, who was twelve years, and his sister Mary Anne (better known to us as Mary), who was ten years his senior. The marked difference in age between Charles and his brother and sister, must never be overlooked in the estimate of the difficulties, and of the heroism, of his later life.

In the essay already cited—that on the *Old Benchers of the Inner Temple*—Charles has drawn for us a touching portrait of his father, the barrister's clerk, under the name of Lovel. After speaking of Samuel Salt, the Bencher, and certain indolent and careless ways from which he “might have suffered severely if he had not had honest people about him,” he digresses characteristically into a description of the faithful servant who was at hand to protect him:

“Lovel took care of everything. He was at once his clerk, his good servant, his dresser, his friend, his ‘flapper,’ his guide, stop-watch, auditor, treasurer. He did nothing without consulting Lovel, or failed in anything without expecting and fearing his admonishing. He

put himself almost too much in his hands, had they not been the purest in the world. He resigned his title almost to respect as a master, if Lovel could ever have forgotten for a moment that he was a servant.

"I knew this Lovel. He was a man of an incorrigible and losing honesty. A good fellow withal, and 'would strike.' In the cause of the oppressed he never considered inequalities, or calculated the number of his opponents. He once wrested a sword out of the hand of a man of quality that had drawn upon him, and pommelled him severely with the hilt of it. The swordsman had offered insult to a female—an occasion upon which no odds against him could have prevented the interference of Lovel. He would stand next day bare-headed to the same person, modestly to excuse his interference, for Lovel never forgot rank, where something better was not concerned. Lovel was the liveliest little fellow breathing; had a face as gay as Garrick's, whom he was said greatly to resemble (I have a portrait of him which confirms it); possessed a fine turn for humorous poetry—next to Swift and Prior; moulded heads in clay or plaster of Paris to admiration, by the dint of natural genius merely; turned cribbage-boards, and such small cabinet toys, to perfection; took a hand at quadrille or bowls with equal facility; made punch better than any man of his degree in England; had the merriest quips and conceits, and was altogether as brimful of rogueries and inventions as you could desire. He was a brother of the angle, moreover, and just such a free, hearty, honest companion as Mr. Izaak Walton would have chosen to go a-fishing with.

"I saw him in his old age, and the decay of his faculties, palsy-smitten, in the last sad stage of human weakness—'a remnant most forlorn of what he was'—yet even then his eye would light up upon the mention of his favourite Garrick. He was greatest, he would say, in Bayes—'was upon the stage nearly throughout the whole performance, and as busy as a bee.' At intervals, too, he would speak of his former life, and how he came up a little boy from Lincoln to go to service, and how his mother cried at parting with him, and how he returned after some few years' absence in his smart new livery, to see her, and she blessed herself at the change and could hardly be brought to believe that it was 'her own bairn.' And then, the excitement subsiding, he would weep, till I have wished

that sad second-childhood might have a mother still to lay its head upon her lap. But the common mother of us all in no long time after received him gently into hers."

I have digressed, in my turn, from the story of Charles Lamb's own life, but it is not without interest to learn from whom Charles inherited, not only something of his versatility of gift, but his chivalry and tenderness.

The household in Crown Office Row were from the beginning poor—of that we may feel certain. An aunt of Charles, his father's sister, formed one of the family, and contributed something to the common income, but John Lamb the elder was the only other bread-winner. And a barrister's clerk with seven children born to him in a dozen years, even if lodging were found him, could not have had much either to save or to spend. Before seven years of age Charles got the rudiments of education from a Mr. William Bird, whose school-room looked "into a discoloured dingy garden in the passage leading from Fetter Lane into Bartlett's Buildings." We owe this, and some other curious information about the academy, to a letter of Lamb's addressed in 1826 to Hone, the editor of the *Every Day Book*. In that periodical had appeared an account of a certain Captain Starkey, who was for some time an assistant of Bird's. The mention of his old teacher's name in this connexion called up in Lamb many recollections of his earliest school-days, and produced the letter just named, full of characteristic matter. The school, out of Fetter Lane, was a day-school for boys, and an evening-school for girls, and Charles and Mary had the advantages, whatever they may have been, of its instruction. Starkey had spoken of Bird as "an eminent writer, and teacher of languages and mathematics," &c.; upon which Lamb's comment is, "Heaven knows what lan-

guages were taught in it then! I am sure that neither my sister nor myself brought any out of it but a little of our native English." Then follow some graphic descriptions of the birch and the ferule, as wielded by Mr. Bird, and other incidents of school-life:

"Oh, how I remember our legs wedged into those uncomfortable sloping desks, where we sat elbowing each other; and the injunctions to attain a free hand, unattainable in that position; the first copy I wrote after, with its moral lesson, 'Art improves nature;' the still earlier pot-hooks and the hangers, some traces of which I fear may yet be apparent in this manuscript."

When Charles had absorbed such elementary learning as was to be acquired under Mr. Bird and his assistants, his father might have been much perplexed where to find an education for his younger son, within his slender means, and yet satisfying his natural ambition, had not a governor of Christ's Hospital, of the name of Yeates, probably a friend of Samuel Salt, offered him a presentation to that admirable charity. And on the 9th of October, 1782, Charles Lamb, then in his eighth year, entered the institution, and remained there for the next seven years.

There is scarcely any portion of his life about which Lamb has not himself taken his readers into his confidence, and in his essay on *Witches and other Night-fears* he has referred to his own sensitive and superstitious childhood, made more sensitive by the books, meat too strong for childish digestion, to which he had free access in his father's collection. "I was dreadfully alive to nervous terrors. The night-time solitude and the dark were my hell. The sufferings I endured in this nature would justify the expression. I never laid my head on my pillow, I suppose, from the fourth to the seventh or eighth year of my

life—so far as memory serves in things so long ago—without an assurance, which realized its own prophecy, of seeing some frightful spectre.” Lamb was fond both of exaggeration and of mystification, as we shall see further on, but this account of his childhood is not inconsistent with descriptions of it from other sources. There was a strain of mental excitability in all the family, and in the case of Charles the nervousness of childhood was increased by the impediment in his speech which remained with him for life, and made so curious a part of his unique personality. “He was an amiable, gentle boy,” wrote one who had been at school with him, “very sensible and keenly observing, indulged by his school-fellows and by his master on account of his infirmity of speech. I never heard his name mentioned,” adds this same school-fellow, Charles Valentine Le Grice, “without the addition of Charles, although, as there was no other boy of the name of Lamb, the addition was unnecessary; but there was an implied kindness in it, and it was a proof that his gentle manners excited that kindness.” Let us note here that this term “gentle” (the special epithet of Shakspeare) seems to have occurred naturally to all Lamb’s friends, as that which best described him. Coleridge, Wordsworth, Landor, and Cary recall no trait more tenderly than this. And let us note also that the addition of his Christian name (Lamb loved the use of it: “So Christians,” he said, “should call one another”) followed him through life and beyond it. There is perhaps no other English writer who is so seldom mentioned by his surname alone.

Of Lamb’s experience of school-life we are fortunate in having a full description in his essay, entitled *Recollections of Christ’s Hospital*, published in 1818, and the sequel to it, called *Christ’s Hospital Five-and-thirty Years Ago* (one

of the *Elia* essays), published two years later. But it requires some familiarity with Lamb's love of masquerading, already referred to, to disengage fact from fancy, and extract what refers to himself only, in these two papers. The former is, what it purports to be, a serious tribute of praise to the dignified and elevating character of the great charity by which he had been fostered. It speaks chiefly of the young scholar's pride in the antiquity of the foundation and the monastic customs and ritual which had survived into modern times; of the founder, "that godly and royal child, King Edward VI., the flower of the Tudor name—the young flower that was untimely cropped, as it began to fill our land with its early odours—the boy-patron of boys—the serious and holy child who walked with Cranmer and Ridley," with many touching reminiscences of the happy days spent in country excursions or visits to the sights of London. But in calling up these recollections it seems to have struck Lamb that his old school, like other institutions, had more than one side, and that the grievances of school-boys, real and imaginary, as well as the humorous side of some of the regulations and traditions of the school, might supply material for another picture not less interesting. Accordingly, under the disguise of the signature *Elia*, he wrote a second account of his school, purporting to be a corrective of the over-colouring employed by "Mr. Lamb" in the former account. The writer affects to be a second witness called in to supplement the evidence of the first. "I remember L. at school," writes Lamb, under the signature of *Elia*. "It happens very oddly that my own standing at Christ's was nearly corresponding to his; and with all gratitude to him for his enthusiasm for the cloisters, I think he has contrived to bring together whatever can be said in praise of

them, dropping all the other side of the argument most ingeniously." This other side Lamb proceeds, with charming humour, to set forth, and he does so in the character of one, a "poor friendless boy," whose parents were far away at "sweet Calne, in Wiltshire," after which his heart was ever yearning. The friendless boy whose personality is thus assumed, was young Samuel Taylor Coleridge, who had entered the school the same year as Lamb, though three years his senior. Coleridge and Lamb were school-fellows for the whole seven years of the latter's residence, and from this early association arose a friendship as memorable as any in English Literature. "Sweet Calne, in Wiltshire," was thus one of Lamb's innocent mystifications. It was to the old home at "sweet Ottery St. Mary," in Devonshire, that young Samuel Taylor's thoughts turned, when he took his lonely country rambles, or shivered at the cold windows of the print-shops to while away a winter's holiday.

In the character of Coleridge—though even here the dramatic position is not strictly sustained—Lamb goes on to relate, in the third person, many incidents of his own boyish life, which differed of necessity from his friend's. Charles Lamb was not troubled how to get through a winter's day, for he had shelter and friendly faces within easy reach of the school. "He had the privilege of going to see them, almost as often as he wished, through some invidious distinction which was denied to us. The present worthy sub-treasurer to the Inner Temple can explain how that happened. He had his tea and hot rolls in the morning, while we were battenning upon our quarter of a penny-loaf moistened with attenuated small-beer, in wooden pig-gins, smacking of the pitched leathern jack it was poured from." And the writer proceeds to draw a charming picture

of some emissary from Lamb's home, his "maid or aunt," bringing him some home-cooked dainty, and squatting down on "some odd stone in a by-nook of the cloisters" while he partook of it. It suggests a pleasant and happy side to this portion of Charles Lamb's life. Humble as his home was, still home was near, and not unmindful of him; and, even taking into account the severities of the discipline and other of the school-boy's natural grievances, it would seem as if Lamb's school-years had a genial influence on his mind and spirit.

As to the education, in the common acceptation of the word, which he gained during those seven years at Christ's Hospital, we may form a very just notion. When he left the school, in his fifteenth year, in November, 1789, he was (according to his own statement made in more than one passage of his writings) deputy Grecian. Leigh Hunt, who entered the school two years after Lamb quitted it, and knew him intimately in later life, says the same thing. Talfourd seems to have applied to the school authorities for precise information, and gives a somewhat different account. He says that "in the language of the school" he was "in Greek form, but not deputy Grecian." No such distinction is understood by "Blues" of a later date, but it may possibly mean that Lamb was doing deputy Grecians' work, though he was in some way technically disqualified from taking rank with them. "He had read," Talfourd goes on to tell us, "Virgil, Sallust, Terence, Lucian, and Xenophon, and had evinced considerable skill in the niceties of Latin composition." Latin, not Greek, was certainly his strong point, and with Terence especially he shows a familiar acquaintance. He wrote colloquial Latin with great readiness, and in turning nursery rhymes into that language, as well as in one or two more serious at

tempts, there are proofs of an ease of expression very creditable to the scholarship of a boy of fourteen. And if (as appears certain) Lamb, though not in the highest form at Christ's Hospital, had the benefit of the teaching of the head-master, the Rev. James Boyer, we have good reason for knowing that, pedant and tyrant though Boyer may have been, he was no bad trainer for such endowments as Coleridge's and Lamb's.

Coleridge, in his *Biographia Literaria*, has drawn a companion picture of the better side of Christ's Hospital discipline, which may judiciously be compared with Lamb's. "At school I enjoyed the inestimable advantage of a very sensible, though at the same time a very severe, master. He early moulded my taste to the preference of Demosthenes to Cicero, of Homer and Theocritus to Virgil, and again of Virgil to Ovid. He habituated me to compare Lucretius (in such extracts as I then read), Terence, and, above all, the chaster poems of Catullus, not only with the Roman poets of the so-called silver and brazen ages, but with even those of the Augustan era; and, on grounds of plain sense and universal logic, to see and assert the superiority of the former in the truth and nativeness both of their thoughts and diction. At the same time that we were studying the Greek tragic poets, he made us read Shakspeare and Milton as lessons; and they were the lessons, too, which required most time and trouble to *bring up*, so as to escape his censure. I learnt from him that poetry, even that of the loftiest, and seemingly that of the wildest odes, had a logic of its own as severe as that of science, and more difficult, because more subtle, more complex, and dependent on more and more fugi've causes. In the truly great poets, he would say, there is a reason assignable, not only for every word, but for the position

of every word ; and I well remember that, availing himself of the synonymes to the Homer of Didymus, he made us attempt to show, with regard to each, why it would not have answered the same purpose, and wherein consisted the peculiar fitness of the word in the original text." Such a teacher, according to Coleridge, was the guiding spirit of Christ's Hospital ; and even allowing for Coleridge having in later life looked back with magnifying eyes upon those early lessons, and *read into* Boyer's teaching something that belonged rather to the learner than the teacher, we need not doubt how great were the young student's obligations to his master. Lamb, who was three years younger, and never reached the same position in the school, may not have benefited directly by this method of Boyer's, but he was the intimate companion of the elder school-boy, and whatever Boyer taught we may be sure was handed on in some form or other to Lamb, tinged though it may have been by the wondrous individuality of his friend.

For the influence of Coleridge over Lamb, during these school-days and afterwards, is one of the most important elements a biographer of Lamb has to take account of. The boy, Samuel Taylor, had entered the school, as we have seen, in the same year. He was a lonely, dreamy lad, not living wholly apart from the pastimes of his companions, wandering with them into the country, and bathing in the New River, on the holidays of summer, but taking his pleasure on the whole sadly, loving above all things knowledge, and greedily devouring whatever of that kind came in his way. Middleton, afterwards Bishop of Calcutta, at the time a Grecian in the school, found him one day reading Virgil in his play-hour, for his own amusement, and reported the circumstance to Boyer, who acted upon it by fostering henceforth in every way his

pupil's talent. A stranger who met the boy one day in the London streets, lost in some day-dream, and moving his arms as one who "spreadeth forth his hands to swim," extracted from him the confession that he was only thinking of Leander and the Hellespont. The stranger, impressed with the boy's love of books, subscribed for him to a library in the neighbourhood of the school, and young Coleridge proceeded, as he has told us, to read "*through* the catalogue, folios and all, whether I understood them or did not understand them, running all risks in skulking out to get the two volumes which I was entitled to have daily." With a full consciousness, as is apparent of his power, he seems at this age to have had no desire for distinction, but only for enlarged experience. At one time he wanted to be apprenticed to a shoemaker, whose wife had shown him some kindness. At a later time, encouraged by the example of his elder brother who had come up to walk the London Hospital, he conceived a passion for the medical profession and read every book on doctoring he could lay his hands on. He went through a phase of atheism—again, probably, out of sheer curiosity—until he was judiciously (so he said) flogged out of it by Boyer. And meantime he was reading metaphysics, and writing verses, in the true spirit of the future Coleridge. The lines he composed in his sixteenth year, suggested by his habit of living in the future till time present and future became in thought inextricably intermingled, surely entitle him to the name of the "marvellous boy," as truly as anything Chatterton had written at the same age:

"On the wide level of a mountain's head
(I knew not where, but 'twas some fairy place),

Their pinions, ostrich-like, for sails outspread,
Two lovely children run an endless race,
A sister and a brother!
That far outstripp'd the other;
Yet ever runs she with reverted face,
And looks and listens for the boy behind;
For he, alas! is blind!
O'er rough and smooth with even step he pass'd,
And knows not whether he be first or last."

A striking feature of these lines is not so much that they are not the echo of any one school of poetry, but that in the special *metaphysic* of the thought, and the peculiar witchery of the verse, Coleridge here anticipated his maturest powers. It is on first thoughts strange that the boy who had read through whole libraries, "folios and all," and who could write verses such as these, should have been so deeply stirred as we know him to have been at the age of seventeen, when the small volume of fourteen sonnets of William Lisle Bowles fell into his hands. What was there, it might well be asked, in the poetry of Bowles, pathetic and graceful as it was, so to quicken the poetic impulse of Coleridge, that years afterwards he wrote of it to a friend as having "done his heart more good than all the other books he ever read, excepting his Bible?" It is the fashion in the present day to speak slightly of Bowles, but his sonnets have unquestionable merit. Their language is melodious to a degree which perhaps only Collins in that century had surpassed, and it expressed a tender melancholy, which may have been inspired also by the study of the same poet. But Coleridge, the omnivorous reader, can hardly have been unacquainted with Gray and Collins, and the writer of such lines as—

"On the wide level of a mountain's head
(I knew not where, but 'twas some fairy place),

could have had little to learn, as to the subtler music of versification, even from the greatest models. But it is significant that Coleridge couples these sonnets with the Bible, and he could hardly have done so without meaning it to be understood that Bowles' sonnets marked some change not purely artistic in his mind's growth. For the melancholy of Gray was constitutional, but the sadness of Bowles had its root in a close habit of introspection, and dwelling upon the moral side of things. The pensive beauty of such a sonnet as the well-known one on the *Influence of Time on Grief* wakes chords that are not often reached by the sentiment of the elder poets. There can be little doubt that at a critical point of Coleridge's life his moral nature was touched in ways for which he was profoundly grateful by these few poems of Bowles. He admits the obligation, indeed, in the first version of his sonnet to Bowles, when he confesses that "those soft strains" waked in him "love and sympathy" as well as fancy, and made him henceforth "not callous to a brother's pains." And we are justified in believing that his young companion, Charles Lamb, was passing with him along the same path of deepening thoughtfulness. He, too, had felt the charm of Bowles' tenderness. In his earliest letters to Coleridge no other name is mentioned oftener and with more admiration; and writing to his friend a few years later, from the "drudgery of the desk's dead wood" at the India House, Lamb complains sorrowfully, "Not a soul loves Bowles here: scarce one has heard of Burns: few but laugh at me for reading my Testament."

It was in the year 1789, the year of the publication of Bowles' earliest sonnets, that Charles Lamb was removed from Christ's Hospital, and the companionship of the two friends was for a while interrupted. Lamb had found other congenial associates among the Blue Coats, and has embalmed their names in various ways in his essays; the two Le Grices from Cornwall, and James White, whose passion was for Shakspeare, and who afterwards compiled a collection of letters, as between Falstaff and his friends, in which he displayed some fancy, but chiefly a certain skill in taking to pieces the phraseology of the humorous characters in the historical plays and re-setting it in divers combinations. It was by these and other like accidents that the tastes and powers of the young Charles Lamb were being drawn forth in those seven years of school-life. The Latin and Greek of the Rev. Matthew Field, the under grammar-master, even the more advanced instruction under James Boyer, had a less important bearing on the future *Elia* than the picturesque surroundings of the Temple, alternating with those of the foundation of Edward VI., and above all, the daily companionship of Samuel Taylor Coleridge.

Leigh Hunt, in his autobiography, has described with great humour and spirit the Christ's Hospital of his day, only two or three years later. Hunt left school at the age of fifteen, when he had attained the same rank as Lamb—deputy Grecian—and, as he tells us, for the same reason. He, too, had an impediment in his speech. "I did not stammer half so badly as I used, but it was understood that a Grecian was bound to deliver a public speech before he left school, and to go into the Church afterwards; and as I could do neither of these things, a Grecian I could not be." During his seven years in the school, Hunt often saw Charles Lamb, when he came to visit his old school-

fellows, and recalled in after-life the "pensive, brown, handsome, and kindly face," and "the gait advancing with a motion from side to side, between involuntary unconsciousness and attempted ease." He dressed even then, Leigh Hunt adds, with that "Quaker-like plainness" that distinguished him all through life.

To leave school must have been to Charles Lamb a bitter sorrow. His aptitude for the special studies of the school was undeniable, and to part from Coleridge must have been a still heavier blow. His biographers have followed Leigh Hunt in pointing out that the school exhibitions to the universities were given on the implied condition of the winners of them proceeding to holy orders, and that in Lamb's case his infirmity of speech made that impossible. But there were probably other reasons, not less cogent. It must have been of importance to his family that Charles should, with as little delay as possible, begin to earn his bread. There was poverty in his home, and the prospect of means becoming yet more straitened. There were deepening anxieties of still graver cast, as we shall see hereafter. The youngest child of the family returned to share this poverty and these anxieties, and to learn thus early the meaning of that law of sacrifice to which he so cheerfully submitted for the remainder of his life.

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CHAPTER II.

FAMILY STRUGGLES AND SORROWS.

[1789-1796.]

IN two of Lamb's Essays of Elia, *My Relations*, and *Mackery End in Hertfordshire*, he has described various members of his own family, and among them his brother John and his sister Mary. These should be carefully read, in conjunction with the less studied utterances on the same theme in his letters, by those who would understand the conditions of that home of which he now became an inmate. Of the family of seven children born in the Temple to John and Elizabeth Lamb, only three survived, the two just mentioned, and Charles. The elder brother, John, at the time of his brother's leaving school a young man of twenty-six, held an appointment in the South Sea House. There was a Plumer in the office, mentioned by Lamb in his essay on that institution, and it was with the Plumer family in Hertfordshire that Lamb's grandmother had been house-keeper. It was probably to such an introduction that John Lamb owed his original clerkship in the office, and it is evident that at the time he first comes under our notice, his position in the office was fairly lucrative, and that the young man, unmarried, and of pleasant artistic tastes, was living by himself, enjoying life, and not trou-

bling himself too much about his poor relations in the Temple. The genial selfishness of his character is described with curious frankness by Charles, who yet seemed to entertain a kind of admiration for the well-dressed diltante who cast in this way a kind of reflected light of respectability upon his humble relatives. He even addresses a sonnet to his brother, and applauds him for keeping "the elder brother up in state." There is a touch of sarcasm here, perhaps; and there is a sadder vein of irony in the description in *My Relations*:

"It does me good as I walk towards the street of my daily avocation on some fine May morning, to meet him marching in a quite opposite direction, with a jolly handsome presence, and shining sanguine face that indicates some purchase in his eye—a Claude or a Hobbima—for much of his enviable leisure is consumed at Christie's and Phillips', or where not, to pick up pictures and such gauds. On these occasions he mostly stoppeth me, to read a short lecture on the advantage a person like me possesses above himself, in having his time occupied with business which he *must do*; assureth me that he often feels it hang heavy on his hands; wishes he had fewer holidays; and goes off Westward Ho! chanting a tune to Pall Mall; perfectly convinced that he has convinced me, while I proceed in my opposite direction tuneless."

We feel that this picture needs no additional touches. "Marching in a quite opposite direction" was what John Lamb continued to do, in all respects, as concerned the dutiful and home-keeping members of his family. It was not to him that father and mother, sister or brother, were to look for help in their great need. Wholly different was the other elder child, next to him in age, Mary Lamb, the *Bridget Elia* of the Essays. Ten years older than Charles, she filled a position to him in these boyish days rather of mother than of sister. It is clear that these two

children from the earliest age depended much on one another for sympathy and support. The mother never understood or appreciated the daughter's worth, and the father, who seems to have married late in life, was already failing in health and powers when Charles left school. The brother and sister were therefore thrown upon one another for companionship and intellectual sympathy, when school friendships were for a while suspended. Mary Lamb shared from childhood her brother's taste for reading. "She was tumbled early, by accident or design, into a spacious closet of good old English reading, without much selection or prohibition, and browsed at will upon that fair and wholesome pasturage." The spacious closet was, it would seem, the library of Samuel Salt, to which both she and Charles early had access. It was a blessed resource for them in face of the monotony and other discomforts of their home and against more serious evils. There was, as we have seen, a taint of mania in the family, inherited from the father's side. It appeared in different shapes in all three children, if we are to trust a casual remark in one of Charles' letters touching his brother John. But in Mary Lamb there is reason to suppose that it had been a cause of anxiety to her parents from an early period of her life. In one of his earliest poems addressed to Charles Lamb, Coleridge speaks of him creeping round a "dear-loved sister's bed, with noiseless step," soothing each pang with fond solicitude. These claims upon his brotherly watchfulness fell to the lot of Charles while still a boy, and they were never relaxed during life. There was a pathetic truth in the prediction of Coleridge which followed :

"Cheerily, dear Charles !
Thou thy best friend shalt cherish many a year."

He continued to devote himself to this, his best friend, for more than forty years, and henceforth the lives of the brother and sister are such that the story of the one can hardly be told apart from the other.

It has been said that Lamb's first years were passed between the Temple and Christ's Hospital—between "cloister and cloister"—but there were happy holiday seasons when he had glimpses of a very different life. These were spent with his grandmother, Mary Field, at the old mansion of the Plumer family, Blakesware, closely adjoining the pleasant village of Widford, in Hertfordshire. The Plumers had two residences in the county, one at Gilston, and the other just mentioned, a few miles distant. The latter was the house where the dowager Mrs. Plumer and younger children of the family resided. Sometimes there would be no members of the family to inhabit it, and at such times old Mrs. Field, who held the post of house-keeper for the last fifty or sixty years of her life, reigned supreme over the old place. Her three grandchildren were then often with her, and the old-fashioned mansion, with its decaying tapestries and carved chimneys, together with the tranquil, rural beauty of the gardens and the surrounding country, made an impression on the childish imagination of Lamb, which is not to be overlooked in considering the influences which moulded his thought and style. There were many ties of family affection binding him to Hertfordshire. His grandmother was a native of the county, and in the beautiful essay called *Mackery End* he has described a visit paid in later life to other relations, in the neighborhood of Wheathampstead. It is noticeable how Lamb, the "scorner of the fields," as Wordsworth termed him, yet showed the true poet's appreciation of English rural scenery, whenever at least his

heart was touched by any association of it with human joy or sorrow.

In 1792 Mrs. Field died at a good old age, and lies buried in the quiet church-yard of Widford. Lamb has preserved her memory in the tender tribute to her virtues, *The Grandame*, which appeared among his earliest published verses :

“ On the green hill top
Hard by the house of prayer, a modest roof,
And not distinguished from its neighbour-barn
Save by a slender tapering length of spire,
The Grandame sleeps. A plain stone barely tells
The name and date to the chance passenger.”

Time and weather have effaced even name and date, but the stone is still pointed out in Widford church-yard. The old lady had suffered long from an incurable disease, and the young Charles Lamb had clearly found some of his earliest religious impressions deepened by watching her courage and resignation :

“ For she had studied patience in the school
Of Christ ; much comfort she had thence derived
And was a *follower* of the Nazarene.”

With her death the tie with Blakesware was not broken. The family of the Lambs had pleasant relations with other of the Widford people. Their constant friend, Mr. Randal Norris, the sub-treasurer of the Inner Temple, had connexions with the place, and long after the death of Mrs. Field we find Lamb and his sister spending occasional holidays in the neighbourhood.

At some date, unfixed, in the two years following his removal from Christ's Hospital, Charles obtained a post of some kind in the South Sea House, where his brother John

held an appointment. No account of this period of his life remains to us, except such as can be drawn from the essay on the *South Sea House*, written thirty years later in the *London Magazine* as the first of the papers signed *Elia*. The essay contains little or nothing about himself, and we are ignorant as to the duties and emoluments of his situation. It was not long, however, before he got promotion, in the form of a clerkship in the accountant's office of the East India Company, obtained for him through the influence of Samuel Salt. His salary began at the rate of 70*l.* a year, rising by gradual steps, and in the service of the East India Company Charles Lamb continued for the rest of his working life.

Of these first years of official life, from the date of his entry into the office in April, 1792, till the spring of 1796, there is little to be learned, save from a few scattered allusions in the letters which from this later date have been preserved. Up to the year 1795 the family of Lamb continued to live in the Temple, when the increasing infirmity of John Lamb the elder made him leave the service of his old employer and retire on a small pension to lodgings in Little Queen Street, Holborn. No fragment of writing of Charles Lamb of earlier date than 1795 has been preserved. His work as a junior clerk absorbed the greater part of his day and of his year. In his first years of service his annual holiday was a single week, and this scanty breathing-space he generally spent in his favourite Hertfordshire. Then there were the occasional visits to the theatre, and it was the theatre which all through life shared with books the keenest love of Lamb and his sister. He has left us an account, in the essay, *My First Play*, of his earliest experiences of this kind, beginning with *Artaxerxes*, and proceeding to *The Lady of the Manor* and the *Way of the*

World, all seen by him when he was between six and seven years old. Seven years elapsed before he saw another play (for play-going was not permitted to Christ's Hospital boys), and he admits that when after that interval he visited the theatre again, much of its former charm had vanished. The old classical tragedy and the old-world sentimental comedy alike failed to satisfy him, and it was not till he first saw Mrs. Siddons that the acted drama reasserted its power. "The theatre became to him, once more," he tells us, "the most delightful of recreations." One of the earliest of his sonnets records the impression made upon him by this great actress. And as soon as we are admitted through his correspondence with Coleridge and others to know his tastes and habits, we find how important a part the drama and all its associations were playing in the direction of his genius.

Nor was the gloom of his home life unrelieved by occasional renewals of the intellectual companionship he had enjoyed at school. Coleridge had gone up to Jesus College, Cambridge, early in 1791, and except during the six months of his soldier's life in the Light Dragoons, remained there for the next four years. During this time he made occasional visits to London, when it was the great pleasure of the two school-fellows to meet at a tavern near Smithfield, the "Salutation and Cat" (probably a well-known rallying-point in the old Christ's days), and there to spend long evenings in discussion on literature and the other topics dear to both. Coleridge was now writing poems, and finding a temporary home for them in the columns of the *Morning Chronicle*. Among them appeared the sonnet on Mrs. Siddons, which was thus probably Lamb's first appearance in print. Both the young men were clearly dreaming of authorship, and Lamb's first

avowed appearance as author was in the first volume of poems by Coleridge, published by Cottle, of Bristol, in the spring of the year 1796. "The effusions signed C. L.," says Coleridge in the preface to this volume, "were written by Mr. Charles Lamb of the India House. Independently of the signature, their superior merit would have sufficiently distinguished them." The effusions consisted of four sonnets, the one already noticed on Mrs. Siddons, one "written at midnight by the sea-side after a voyage," and two, in every way the most noteworthy, dealing with the one love romance of Charles Lamb's life. The sonnets have no special literary value, but the first of these has importance enough in its bearing on Lamb's character to justify quotation:

"Was it some sweet device of Faëry
That mocked my steps with many a lonely glade,
And fancied wanderings with a fair-haired maid?
Have these things been? Or what rare witchery,
Impregning with delights the charmed air,
Enlightened up the semblance of a smile
In those fine eyes? methought they spake the while
Soft soothing things, which might enforce despair
To drop the murdering knife, and let go by
His foul resolve. And does the lonely glade
Still court the footsteps of the fair-haired maid?
Still in her locks the gales of summer sigh?
While I forlorn do wander, reckless where,
And 'mid my wanderings meet no Anna there."

If the allusions in this and the following sonnet stood alone, we might well be asking, as in the case of Shakespeare's sonnets, whether the situation was not dramatic rather than autobiographical; but we have good reasons for inferring that the Anna, "the fair-haired maid" of

these poems, had a real existence. His first love is referred to constantly in later letters and essays as Alice W——n, and it is easy to perceive that the Anna of the sonnets and this Alice W——n were the same person. In both cases the fair hair and the mild, pale blue eyes are the salient features. But the sonnets that tell of these tell also of the "winding wood-walks green," and

"the little cottage which she loved,
The cottage which did once my all contain."

From these alone we might infer that Lamb had first met the subject of them, not in London, but during his frequent visits to Blakesware. Lamb himself, often so curiously out-spoken on the subject of his personal history, has nowhere directly told us where he met his Alice, but he cannot seriously have meant to keep the secret. In the essay, *Blakesmoor in H——shire*, he recalls the picture-gallery with the old family portraits, and among them "that beauty with the cool, blue, pastoral drapery, and a lamb, that hung next the great bay-window, with the bright yellow Hertfordshire hair, *so like my Alice!*" His "fair-haired maid" was clearly from Hertfordshire. It will be seen hereafter what light is further thrown on the matter by Lamb himself. All that we know as certain is that Lamb, while yet a boy, lost his heart, and that, whether the course of true love ran smooth or not, he willingly submitted to forego the hoped-for tie, when a claim upon his devotion appeared in the closer circle of his home.

Unless, indeed, a more personal and even more terrible occasion of this sacrifice had arisen at an earlier date. We know, on his own admission, that in the winter of 1795-'96, Charles Lamb himself succumbed to the family malady, and passed some weeks in confinement. In the earliest

of his letters that has been preserved, belonging to the early part of 1796, he tells his friend Coleridge the sad truth :

"My life has been somewhat diversified of late. The six weeks that finished last year and began this, your very humble servant spent very agreeably in a mad-house at Hoxton. I am got somewhat rational now, and don't bite any one. But mad I was! . . . Coleridge, it may convince you of my regard for you when I tell you my head ran on you in my madness, as much almost as on another person, who I am inclined to think was the more immediate cause of my temporary frenzy."

The "other person" can have been no other than the fair-haired Alice, and if disappointed love was the immediate cause of his derangement, the discovery in him of this tendency may have served to break off all relations between the lovers still more effectually. Wonderfully touching are the lines which, as he tells Coleridge in the same letter, were written by him in his prison-house in one of his lucid intervals :

"TO MY SISTER.

"If from my lips some angry accents fell,
Peevish complaint, or harsh reproof unkind,
'Twas but the error of a sickly mind
And troubled thoughts, clouding the purer well,
And waters clear, of Reason : and for me
Let this my verse the poor atonement be—
My verse, which thou to praise wert e'er inclined
Too highly, and with a partial eye to see
No blemish. Thou to me didst ever show
Kindest affection ; and would'st oft times lend
An ear to the despairing, lovesick lay,
Weeping my sorrows with me, who repay
But ill the mighty debt of love I owe,
Mary, to thee, my sister and my friend."

The history of many past weeks or months seems written in these lines; the history of a hopeless attachment, a reason yielding to long distress of mind, and a sister's love already repaying by anticipation the "mighty debt" which in after days it was itself to owe.

This year, 1795-'96, was indeed a memorable one in the annals of the brother and sister. The fortunes of the Lamb family were at low ebb. They had removed to lodgings in Little Queen Street, the mother a confirmed invalid, and the father sinking gradually into second childhood. Charles had been temporarily under restraint, and Mary Lamb, in addition to the increasing labor of ministering to her parents, was working for their common maintenance by taking in needle-work. It is not strange that under this pressure her own reason, so often threatened, at last gave way. It was in September of 1796 that the awful calamity of her life befell. A young apprentice girl, who was at work in the common sitting-room while dinner was preparing, appears to have excited the latent mania. Mary Lamb seized a knife from the table, pursued the girl round the room, and finally stabbed to the heart her mother who had interfered in the girl's behalf. It was Charles Lamb himself who seized the unhappy sister, and wrested the knife from her hand, but not before she had hurled in her rage other knives about the room, and wounded, though not fatally, the now almost imbecile father. *The Times* of a few days later relates that an inquest was held on the following day, and a verdict of insanity returned in the case of the unhappy daughter. Lamb's account of the event is given in a letter to Coleridge, of September 27th:

"MY DEAREST FRIEND,—White, or some of my friends, or the public papers by this time may have informed you of the terrible calam-

ties that have fallen on our family. I will only give you the outlines: My poor dear, dearest sister, in a fit of insanity, has been the death of her own mother. I was at hand only time enough to snatch the knife out of her grasp. She is at present in a mad-house, from whence I fear she must be moved to an hospital. God has preserved to me my senses—I eat, and drink, and sleep, and have my judgment, I believe, very sound. My poor father was slightly wounded, and I am left to take care of him and my aunt. Mr. Norris, of the Bluecoat School, has been very kind to us, and we have no other friend; but, thank God, I am very calm and composed, and able to do the best that remains to do. Write as religious a letter as possible, but no mention of what is gone and done with. With me the ‘former things are passed away,’ and I have something more to do than to feel.

“God Almighty have us well in His keeping.

“C. LAMB.

“Mention nothing of poetry. I have destroyed every vestige of past vanities of that kind. Do as you please; but if you publish, publish mine (I give free leave) without name or initial, and never send me a book, I charge you.”

A second letter followed in less than a week, in a tone somewhat less forlorn:

“Your letter was an inestimable treasure to me. It will be a comfort to you, I know, to know that our prospects are somewhat brighter. My poor dear, dearest sister, the unhappy and unconscious instrument of the Almighty’s judgments on ~~my~~ house, is restored to her senses; to a dreadful sense and recollection of what has past, awful to her mind and impressive (as it must be to the end of life), but tempered with religious resignation and the reasonings of a sound judgment, which, in this early stage, knows how to distinguish between a deed committed in a transient fit of frenzy and the terrible guilt of a mother’s murder. I have seen her. I found her, this morning, calm and serene; far, very far, from an indecent, forgetful serenity; she has a most affectionate and tender concern for what has happened. Indeed, from the beginning, frightful and hopeless as her disorder seemed, I had confidence enough in her strength of mind and religious principle, to look forward to a time

when *even she* might recover tranquillity. God be praised, Coleridge, wonderful as it is to tell, I have never once been otherwise than collected and calm; even on the dreadful day, and in the midst of the terrible scene, I preserved a tranquillity which by-standers may have construed into indifference—a tranquillity not of despair. Is it folly or sin in me to say that it was a religious principle that *most* supported me? I allow much to other favourable circumstances. I felt that I had something else to do than to regret. On that first evening, my aunt was lying insensible, to all appearance like one dying—my father, with his poor forehead plastered over, from a wound he had received from a daughter dearly loved by him, who loved him no less dearly—my mother a dead and murdered corpse in the next room—yet was I wonderfully supported. I closed not my eyes in sleep that night, but lay without terrors and without despair. I have lost no sleep since. I had been long used not to rest in things of sense; had endeavoured after a comprehension of mind, unsatisfied with the 'ignorant present time,' and this kept me up. I had the whole weight of the family thrown on me; for my brother, little disposed (I speak not without tenderness for him) at any time to take care of old age and infirmities, had now, with his bad leg, an exemption from such duties, and I was now left alone. . . .

"Our friends here have been very good. Sam Le Grice, who was then in town, was with me the three or four first days, and was as a brother to me; gave up every hour of his time, to the very hurting of his health and spirits, in constant attendance and humouring my poor father; talked with him, read to him, played at cribbage with him (for so short is the old man's recollection that he was playing at cards, as though nothing had happened, while the coroner's inquest was sitting over the way). Samuel wept tenderly when he went away, for his mother wrote him a very severe letter on his loitering so long in town, and he was forced to go. Mr. Norris, of Christ's Hospital, has been as a father to me; Mrs. Norris as a mother, though we had few claims on them. A gentleman, brother to my godmother, from whom we never had right or reason to expect any such assistance, sent my father 20*l.*; and to crown all these God's blessings to our family at such a time, an old lady, a cousin of my father's and aunt's, a gentlewoman of fortune, is to take my aunt and make her comfortable for the short remainder of her days. My aunt is recovered, and as well as ever, and highly pleased at thoughts

of going; and has generously given up the interest of her little money (which was formerly paid my father for her board) wholly and solely to my sister's use. Reckoning this, we have, Daddy and I, for our two selves and an old maid-servant to look after him when I am out, which will be necessary, 170*l.*, or 180*l.* rather, a year, out of which we can spare 50*l.* or 60*l.* at least for Mary while she stays at Islington, where she must and shall stay during her father's life, for his and her comfort. I know John will make speeches about it, but she shall not go into an hospital. The good lady of the mad-house, and her daughter—an elegant, sweet-behaved young lady—love her and are taken with her amazingly; and I know from her own mouth she loves them, and longs to be with them as much. Poor thing! they say she was but the other morning saying she knew she must go to Bethlehem for life; that one of her brothers would have it so, but the other would wish it not, but be obliged to go with the stream; that she had often as she passed Bethlehem thought it likely, 'here it may be my fate to end my days,' conscious of a certain flightiness in her poor head oftentimes, and mindful of more than one severe illness of that nature before. A legacy of 100*l.*, which my father will have at Christmas, and this 20*l.* I mentioned before, with what is in the house, will much more than set us clear. If my father, an old servant-maid, and I, can't live, and live comfortably, on 130*l.* or 120*l.* a year, we ought to burn by slow fires; and I almost would, that Mary might not go into an hospital. Let me not leave one unfavourable impression on your mind respecting my brother. Since this has happened he has been very kind and brotherly, but I fear for his mind. He has taken his ease in the world, and is not fit himself to struggle with difficulties, nor has much accustomed himself to throw himself into their way; and I know his language is already, "Charles, you must take care of yourself, you must not abridge yourself of a single pleasure you have been used to," &c., &c., and in that style of talking. But you, a necessarian, can respect a difference of mind, and love what is amiable in a character not perfect. He has been very good, but I fear for his mind. Thank God, I can unconnect myself with him, and shall manage all my father's monies in future myself if I take charge of Daddy, which poor John has not even hinted a wish, at any future time even, to share with me. The lady at this mad-house assures me that I may dismiss immediately both doctor and apothecary.

cary, retaining occasionally a composing draught or so for a while; and there is a less expensive establishment in her house, where she will not only have a room and nurse to herself for 50*l.* or guineas a year—the outside would be 60*l.*—you know by economy how much more even I shall be able to spare for her comforts. She will, I fancy, if she stays make one of the family, rather than of the patients; the old and young ladies I like exceedingly, and she loves dearly; and they, as the saying is, take to her extraordinarily, if it is extraordinary that people who see my sister should love her. Of all the people I ever saw in the world, my poor sister was most and thoroughly devoid of the quality of selfishness. I will enlarge upon her qualities, dearest soul, in a future letter for my own comfort, for I understand her thoroughly; and if I mistake not, in the most trying situation that a human being can be found in, she will be found (I speak not with sufficient humility, I fear, but humanly and foolishly speaking) she will be found, I trust, uniformly great and amiable. God keep her in her present mind, to whom be thanks and praise for all His dispensations to mankind."

It is necessary for the full understanding of what Charles Lamb was, and of the life that lay before him, that this deeply interesting account should be given in his own words. Anything that a biographer might add would only weaken the picture of courage, dutifulness, and affection here presented. The only fitting sequel to it is the history of the remaining five-and-thirty years in which he fulfilled so nobly and consistently his self-imposed task.

That task was made lighter to him than in the natural dejection of the first sad moments he could have dared to hope. The poor old father survived the mother but a few months, and passed quietly out of life early in the following year. The old aunt, who did not long find a home with the capricious relative who had undertaken the charge of her, returned to Charles and his father, only, however, to survive her brother a few weeks. Charles was now free to consult his own wishes as to the future care of his sis-

ter. She was still in the asylum at Hoxton, and it was his earnest desire that she might return to live with him. By certain conditions and arrangements between him and the proper authorities, her release from confinement was ultimately brought about, and the brother's guardianship was accepted as sufficient for the future. She returned to share his solitude for the remainder of his life. The mania which had once attacked Charles, never in his case returned. Either the shock of calamity, or the controlling power of the vow he had laid on himself, overmastered the inherited tendency. But in the case of Mary Lamb it returned at frequent intervals through life, never again, happily, with any disastrous result. The attacks seem to have been generally attended with forewarnings, which enabled the brother and sister to take the necessary measures, and a friend of the Lambs has related how on one occasion he met the brother and sister, at such a season, walking hand in hand across the fields to the old asylum, both bathed in tears.

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CHAPTER III.

FIRST EXPERIMENTS IN LITERATURE.

[1796-1800.]

EARLY in 1797 Charles Lamb and his sister began their life of "dual loneliness." But during these first years the brother's loneliness was often unshared. Much of Mary Lamb's life was passed in visits to the asylum, and the mention of her successive attacks is of melancholy recurrence in Charles' letters. Happily for the brother's sanity of mind, he was beginning to find friends and sympathies in new directions. What books had been to him all his life, and what education he had been finding in them, is evident from his earliest extant letters. His published correspondence begins in 1796, with a letter to Coleridge, then at Bristol, and from this and other letters of the same year we see the first signs of that variety of literary taste so noteworthy in a young man of twenty-one. The letters of this year are mainly on critical subjects. He encloses his own sonnet, and points out the passages in elder writers, Parnell or Cowley, to which he has been indebted. Or he acknowledges poems of Coleridge, sent for his criticism, and proceeds to express his opinion on them with frankness. He had been introduced to Southey, by Coleridge, some time in 1795, and he writes to the latter, "With *Joan of Arc* I have been delighted, amazed; I had not presumed to expect any-

thing of such excellence from Southey. Why, the poem is alone sufficient to redeem the character of the age we live in from the imputation of degenerating in poetry, were there no such beings extant as Burns, Bowles, and Cowper, and —; fill up the blank how you please." It is noticeable also how prompt the young man was to discover the real significance of the poetic revival of the latter years of the eighteenth century. Burns he elsewhere mentions at this time to Coleridge in stronger terms of enthusiasm as having been the "God of my idolatry, as Bowles was of yours," nor was he less capable of appreciating the "divine chit-chat" of Cowper. The real greatness of Wordsworth he was one of the earliest to discover and to proclaim. And at the same time his imagination was being stirred by the romantic impulse that was coming from Germany. "Have you read," he asks Coleridge, "the ballad called 'Leonora' in the second number of the *Monthly Magazine*? If you have!!! There is another fine song, from the same author (Bürger) in the third number, of scarce inferior merit." But still more remarkable in the intellectual history of so young a man is the acquaintance he shows with the earlier English authors, at a time when the revival of Shakspearian study was comparatively recent, and when the other Elizabethan dramatists were all but unknown save to the archæologist. We must suppose that the library of Samuel Salt was more than usually rich in old folios, for certainly Lamb had not only "browsed" (to use his own expression), but had read and criticized deeply, as well as discursively. In a letter to Coleridge of this same year, 1796, he quotes with enthusiasm the rather artificial lines of Massinger in *A very Woman*, pointing out the "fine effect of the double endings:"

"Not far from where my father lives, a lady,
 A neighbour by, blest with as great a beauty
 As nature durst bestow without undoing,
 Dwelt, and most happily, as I thought then,
 And blest the house a thousand times she dwelt in.
 This beauty, in the blossom of my youth,
 When my first fire knew no adulterate incense,
 Nor I no way to flatter but my fondness,
 In all the bravery my friends could show me,
 In all the faith my innocence could give me,
 In the best language my true tongue could tell me,
 And all the broken sighs my sick heart lend me,
 I sued and served; long did I serve this lady,
 Long was my travail, long my trade to win her;
 With all the duty of my soul I served her."¹

Beaumont and Fletcher he quotes with no less delight, "in which authors I can't help thinking there is a greater richness of poetical fancy than in any one, Shakspeare excepted." Again, he asks the same inseparable friend, "Among all your quaint readings did you ever light upon *Walton's Complete Angler*? I asked you the question once before; it breathes the very spirit of innocence, purity, and simplicity of heart; there are many choice old verses interspersed in it: it would sweeten a man's temper at any time to read it: it would Christianize every discordant angry passion." And while thus discursive in his older reading, he was hardly less so in the literature of his own century. He had been fascinated by the *Confessions* of Rousseau, and was for a time at least under the influence of the sentimental school of novelists, the followers of Richardson and Sterne in England. So varied was

¹ These lines are interesting as having been chosen by Lamb for a "motto" to his first published poems. As so used, they clearly bore a reference to his own patient wooing at that time.

the field of authors and subjects on which his style was being formed and his fancy nourished.

Long afterwards, in his essay on *Books and Reading*, he boasted that he could read anything which he called a *book*. "I have no repugnances. Shaftesbury is not too genteel for me, nor Jonathan Wild too low." But this versatility of sympathy, which was at the root of so large a part of both matter and manner when he at length discovered where his real strength lay, had the effect of delaying that discovery for some time. His first essays in literature were mainly imitative, and though there is not one of them that is without his peculiar charm, or that a lover of Charles Lamb would willingly let die, they are more interesting from the fact of their authorship, and from the light they throw on the growth of Lamb's mind, than for their intrinsic value.

Meantime, his life in the lonely Queen Street lodging was cheered by the acquisition of some new friends, chiefly introduced by Coleridge. He had known Southey since 1795, and some time in the following year, or early in 1797, he had formed a closer bond of sympathy with Charles Lloyd, son of a banker of Birmingham, a young man of poetic taste and melancholy temperament, who had taken up his abode, for the sake of intellectual companionship, with Coleridge at Bristol. One of the first results of this companionship was a second literary venture in which the new friend took a share. A second edition of *Poems by S. T. Coleridge, to which are now added Poems by Charles Lamb and Charles Lloyd*, appeared at Bristol, in the summer of 1797, published by Coleridge's devoted admirer, Joseph Cottle.

"There were inserted in my former edition," writes Coleridge in the preface, "a few sonnets of my friend and

old school-fellow, Charles Lamb. He has now communicated to me a complete collection of all his poems; *quæ qui non prorsus amet, illum omnes et virtutes et veneres odere.*" The phrase is a trifle grandiloquent to describe the short list—some fifteen in all—of sonnets and occasional verses here printed. Nor is there anything in their style to indicate the influence of new models. A tender grace of the type of his old favourite, Bowles, is still their chief merit, and they are interesting as showing how deeply the events of the past few years had stirred the religious side of Charles Lamb's nature. A review of the day characterized the manner of Lamb and Lloyd as "plaintive," and the epithet is not ill-chosen. Lamb was still living chiefly in the past, and the thought of his sister, and recollection of the pious "Grandame" in Hertfordshire, with kindred memories of his own childhood and disappointed affections, make the subject-matter of almost all the verse. A little allegorical poem, with the title of "A Vision of Repentance," relegated to an appendix in this same volume, marks the most sacred confidence that Lamb ever gave to the world as to his meditations on the mystery of evil.

It is unlikely that this little venture brought any profit to its authors, or that a subsequent volume of blank verse by Lamb and Lloyd in the following year was more remunerative. To Lloyd the question was doubtless of less importance; but Lamb was anxious for his sister's sake to add to his scanty income, and with this view he resolved to make an experiment in prose fiction. In the year 1798 he composed his little story, bearing the title, as originally issued, of *A Tale of Rosamund Gray and Old Blind Margaret*.

This "miniature romance," as Talfourd calls it, is per-

haps better known, after the Essays of Elia, than any of Lamb's writings, and the secret of its charm, in the face of improbabilities and unrealities of many kinds, is one of the curiosities of literature. The story itself is built up of the most heterogeneous materials. The idea of the story, the ruin of a village maiden, Rosamund Gray, by a melodramatic villain with the "uncommon" name of Matravis, was suggested to Lamb, as he admits in a letter to Southey, by a "foolish" (and it must be added, a very scurrilous) old ballad about "an old woman clothed in grey." The name of his heroine he borrowed from some verses of his friend Lloyd's (not included in their joint volume), and that of the villain from one of the ruffians employed to murder the king in Marlowe's *Edward the Second*—that death-scene which he afterwards told the world "moved pity and terror beyond any scene ancient or modern" with which he was acquainted. The conduct of the little story bears strong traces of the influence of Richardson and Mackenzie, and a rather forced reference to the latter's *Julia de Roubigné* seems to show where he had lately been reading. A portion of the narrative is conducted by correspondence between the two well-bred young ladies of the story, and when one of them begins a letter to her cousin, "Health, innocence, and beauty shall be thy bridesmaids, my sweet cousin," we are at once aware in what school of polite letter-writing the author had studied. After the heroine, the two principal characters are a brother and sister, Allan and Elinor Clare, the relation between whom (the sister is represented as just ten years older than her brother) is borrowed almost without disguise from that of Lamb and his sister Mary. "Elinor Clare was the best good creature, the least selfish human being I ever knew, always at work for other

people's good, planning other people's happiness, continually forgetful to consult for her own personal gratifications, except indirectly in the welfare of another; while her parents lived, the most attentive of daughters; since they died, the kindest of sisters. I never knew but *one* like her." There is besides a school-fellow of Allan's, who precedes him to college, evidently a recollection of the school-friendship with Coleridge. But still more significant, as showing the personal element in the little romance, is the circumstance that Lamb lays the scene of it in that Hertfordshire village of Widford where so many of his own happiest hours had been spent, and that the heroine, Rosamund Gray, is drawn with those features which he was never weary of dwelling in the object of his own boyish passion. Rosamund, with the pale blue eyes and the "yellow Hertfordshire hair," is but a fresh copy of his Anna and his Alice. That Rosamund Gray had an actual counterpart in real life seems certain, and the little group of cottages, in one of which she dwelt with her old grandmother, is still shown in the village of Widford, about half a mile from the site of the old mansion of Blakesware. And it is the tradition of the village, and believed by those who have the best means of judging, that "Rosamund Gray" (her real name was equally remote from this, and from Alice W——n) was Charles Lamb's first and only love. Her fair hair and eyes, her goodness, and (we may assume) her poverty, were drawn from life. The rest of the story in which she bears a part is of course pure fiction. The real Anna of the sonnets made a prosperous marriage, and lived to a good old age.

As if Lamb were resolved to give his little tale the character of personal "confessions," he has contrived to

introduce into it, by quotation or allusion, all his favourite writers, from Walton and Wither to Mackenzie and Burns. But of more interest from this point of view than any resemblances of detail is the shadow, as of recent calamity, that rests upon the story, and the strain of religious emotion that pervades it. It is this that gives the romance, conventional as it is for the most part in its treatment of life and manners, its real attractiveness. It is redolent of Lamb's native sweetness of heart, delicacy of feeling, and undefinable charm of style. And these qualities did not altogether fail to attract attention. The little venture was a moderate success, and brought its author some "few guineas." One tribute to its merits was paid many years later, which, we may hope, did not fail to reach the author. Shelley, writing to Leigh Hunt from Leghorn, in 1819, and acknowledging the receipt of a parcel of books, adds, "With it came, too, Lamb's works. What a lovely thing is his *Rosamund Gray*! How much knowledge of the sweetest and deepest part of our nature in it! When I think of such a mind as Lamb's, when I see how unnoticed remain things of such exquisite and complete perfection, what should I hope for myself, if I had not higher objects in view than fame?"

There is scanty material for the biographer of Lamb and his sister during these first four years of struggling poverty. The few events that varied their monotonous life are to be gathered from the letters to Coleridge and Southey, written during this period. The former was married, and living at Nether Stowey, near Bristol, where Charles and Mary Lamb paid him apparently their first visit, during one of Charles' short holidays in the summer of 1797. This visit was made memorable by a slight accident that befell Coleridge on the day of their arrival, and forced

him to remain at home while his visitors explored the surrounding country. Left alone in his garden, he composed the curiously Wordsworthian lines, bearing for title (he was perhaps reminded of Ferdinand, in the *Tempest*), "This lime-tree bower my prison," in which he apostrophizes Lamb as the "gentle-hearted Charles," and addresses him as one who had

"Hungered after nature, many a year
In the great city pent, winning thy way
With sad and patient zeal, through evil and pain
And strange calamity."

Charles did not quite relish the epithet "gentle-hearted," and showed that he winced under a title that savoured a little of pity or condescension. Indeed, it is evident, in spite of the real affection that Lamb never ceased to feel for Coleridge, that the relations between the friends were often strained during these earlier days. This year, 1797, was that of the joint volume, and the mutual criticism indulged so freely by both was leaving a little soreness behind. Then there was the question of precedence between Lamb and Lloyd in this same volume, which was settled in Lloyd's favour, not without a few pangs, confessed by Lamb himself. And when, in the following year, Coleridge was on the eve of his visit to Germany with the Wordsworths, a foolish message of his, "If Lamb requires any knowledge, let him apply to me," had been repeated to Lamb by some injudicious friend, and did not tend to improve matters. Lamb retaliated by sending Coleridge a grimly humorous list of "Theses quædam Theologicæ," to be by him "defended or oppugned (or both) at Leipsic or Göttingen." Numbers five and six in this list may be given as a sample. "Whether the higher order of Ser-

aphim illuminati ever sneer?" "Whether pure intelligences can love, or whether they can love anything besides pure intellect?" The rest are in the same vein, and if they have any point at all, it must lie in an allusion to certain airs of lofty superiority in which Coleridge had indulged to the annoyance of his friend. There was a temporary soreness in the heart of Charles on parting with his old companion. There had been a grievance of the same kind before. It had been bitterly repented of, even in a flood of tears. To the beginning of this year, 1798, belong the touching verses composed in the same spirit of self-confession that has marked so much of his writing up to this period, about the "old familiar faces." In their earliest shape they are more directly autobiographical. Lamb afterwards omitted the first stanza, and gave the lines a less personal character. The precise occasion of their being written seems uncertain, but the reference to the friend whom he had so nearly thrown away, in a moment of pique, is unmistakable:

"Where are they gone, the old familiar faces?
I had a mother, but she died, and left me—
Died prematurely in a day of horrors—
All, all are gone, the old familiar faces.

"I have had playmates, I have had companions
In my days of childhood, in my joyful school-days,
All, all are gone, the old familiar faces.

"I have been laughing, I have been carousing,
Drinking late, sitting late, with my bosom cronies—
All, all are gone, the old familiar faces.

"I loved a love once, fairest among women.
Closed are her doors on me, I must not see her—
All, all are gone, the old familiar faces.

"I had a friend, a kinder friend has no man.
Like an ingrate, I left my friend abruptly!
Left him to muse on the old familiar faces.

"Ghost-like I paced round the haunts of my childhood.
Earth seemed a desert I was bound to traverse,
Seeking to find the old familiar faces.

"Friend of my bosom, thou more than a brother;
Why wert not thou born in my father's dwelling,
So might we talk of the old familiar faces.

"For some they have died, and some they have left me,
And some are taken from me, all are departed;
All, all are gone, the old familiar faces."

The "friend of my bosom" was the new associate, Lloyd, who seems for a time at least to have taken Coleridge's place as Lamb's special confidant. He, too, had had his grievances against the "greater Ajax," and the two humbler combatants, who had "come into battle under his shield," found consolation at this time in one another. Lloyd was moody and sensitive—even then a prey to the melancholy which clung to him through life, and it was well for Lamb that on Coleridge leaving England he had some more genial companionship to take refuge in. It was three years since he had made the acquaintance of Southey. In the summer of 1797 he and Lloyd had passed a fortnight under his roof in Hampshire. And now that Coleridge was far away, it was Southey who naturally took his place as literary adviser and confidant.

We gather from Lamb's letters to Southey, in 1798-'99, that this change of association for the time was good for him. Coleridge and Lloyd were of temperaments too nearly akin to Lamb's to be wholly serviceable in these

days, when the calamities in his family still overshadowed him. The friendship of Southey, the healthy-natured, the industrious, and the methodical, was a wholesome change of atmosphere. Southey was now living at Westbury, near Bristol. Though only a few months Lamb's senior, he had been three years a married man, and was valiantly working to support his young wife by that craft of literature which he followed so patiently to his life's end. In this year, 1798, he was in his sweetest and most humorous ballad vein. It was the year of the *Well of St. Keyne* and the *Battle of Blenheim*, and other of those shorter pieces by which Southey will always be most widely known. He had not failed to discover Lamb's value as a critic, and each eclogue or ballad, as it is written, is submitted to his judgment. The result of this change of interest is shown in a marked difference of tone and style in Lamb's letters. He is less sad and meditative, and begins to exhibit that peculiar playfulness which we associate with the future Elia. One day he writes, "My tailor has brought me home a new coat, lapelled, with a velvet collar. He assures me everybody wears velvet collars now. Some are born fashionable, some achieve fashion, and others, like your humble servant, have fashion thrust upon them." And his remarks on Southey's ode *To a Spider* (in which he justly notes the metre as its chief merit, and wonders that "Burns had not hit upon it") are followed by a discursive pleasantry having the true Elia ring, "I love this sort of poems that open a new intercourse with the most despised of the animal and insect race. I think this vein may be further opened. Peter Pindar hath very prettily apostrophized a fly; Burns hath his mouse and his louse; Coleridge, less successfully, hath made overtures of intimacy to a jackass, therein only following, at unressembling

distance, Sterne and greater Cervantes. Besides these, I know of no other examples of breaking down the partition between us and our 'poor earth-born companions.'" And the suggestion that follows, that Southey should undertake a series of poems, with the object of awakening sympathy for animals too generally ill-treated or held in disgust, is most characteristic, both in matter and manner. Indeed, it is in these earlier letters to Southey, rather than in his poetry or in *Rosamund Gray*, that Charles Lamb was feeling the way to his true place in literature. Already we observe a vein of reflectiveness and a curious felicity of style which owe nothing to any predecessor. And if his humour, even in his lightest moods, has a tinge of sadness, it is not to be accounted for only by the suffering he had passed through. It belonged, in fact, to the profound humanity of its author, to the circumstance that with him, as with all true humourists, humour was but one side of an acute and almost painful sympathy.

At the close of the year 1799 Coleridge returned from Germany, and the intercourse between the two friends was at once resumed, never again to be interrupted. Early in the year following Charles and his sister removed from the Queen Street lodging, where they had continued to reside since his mother's death, to Chapel Street, Pentonville. It appears from a letter of Charles to Coleridge, in the spring of 1800, that there was no alleviation of his burden of constant anxiety. The faithful old servant of many years had died, after a few days' illness, and Lamb writes, "Mary, in consequence of fatigue and anxiety, is fallen ill again, and I was obliged to remove her yesterday. I am left alone in a house with nothing but Hetty's dead body to keep me company. To-morrow I bury her, and

then I shall be quite alone with nothing but a cat to remind me that the house has been full of living beings like myself. My heart is quite sunk, and I don't know where to look for relief. Mary will get better again, but her constantly being liable to these attacks is dreadful; nor is it the least of our evils that her case and all our story is so well known around us. We are in a manner *marked*. Excuse my troubling you, but I have nobody by me to speak to me. I slept out last night, not being able to endure the change and the stillness; but I did not sleep well, and I must come back to my own bed. I am going to try and get a friend to come and be with me to-morrow. I am completely shipwrecked. My head is quite bad. I almost wish that Mary were dead. God bless you. Love to Sarah and little Hartley."

It is the solitary instance in which he allows us to see his patience and hopefulness for a moment failing him. That terrible sentence "we are in a manner *marked*" has not perhaps received its due weight, in the estimate of what the brother and sister were called upon to bear. It seems certain that if they were not actually driven from lodging to lodging, because the dreadful rumour of madness could not be shaken off, they were at least shunned and kept at a distance wherever they went. The rooms in Pentonville they soon received notice to quit, and it was then that Charles turned, perhaps because they were more quiet and secure from vulgar overlooking, to the old familiar and dearly-loved surroundings of his childhood. "I am going to change my lodgings," he writes later in this same year to his Cambridge friend, Manning, in a tone of cheerful looking-forward simply marvellous, considering the immediate cause of the removal. "I am going to change my lodgings, having received a hint that it

would be agreeable, at our Lady's next feast. I have partly fixed upon most delectable rooms, which look out (when you stand a tiptoe) over the Thames and Surrey Hills, at the upper end of King's Bench Walks in the Temple. There I shall have all the privacy of a house without the encumbrance, and shall be able to lock my friends out as often as I desire to hold free converse with my immortal mind—for my present lodgings resemble a minister's *levée*, I have so increased my acquaintance (as they call 'em) since I have resided in town. Like the country mouse that had tasted a little of urbane manners, I long to be nibbling my own cheese by my dear self, without mouse-traps and time-traps. By my new plan I shall be as airy, up four pair of stairs, as in the country, and in a garden in the midst of enchanting (more than Mahomedan paradise) London, whose dirtiest drab-frequented alley, and her lowest-bowing tradesman, I would not exchange for Skiddaw, Helvellyn, James, Walter, and the parson into the bargain. O! her lamps of a night! her rich goldsmiths, print-shops, toy-shops, mercers, hardware men, pastry-cooks, St. Paul's Church-yard, the Strand, Exeter Change, Charing Cross, with the man *upon* a black horse! These are thy gods, O London! Ain't you mightily moped on the banks of the Cam? Had you not better come and set up *here*? You can't think what a difference. All the streets and pavements are pure gold, I warrant you. At least, I know an alchemy that turns her mud into that metal—a mind that loves to be at home in crowds."

In a letter to Wordsworth, of somewhat later date, replying to an invitation to visit the Lakes, he dwells on the same passionate love for the great city—the "place of his kindly engendure"—not alone for its sights and

sounds, its print-shops, and its bookstalls, but for the human faces, without which the finest scenery failed to satisfy his sense of beauty. "The wonder of these sights," he says, "impels me into night-walks about her crowded streets, and I often shed tears in the motley Strand from fulness of joy at so much life. All these emotions must be strange to you; so are your rural emotions to me. But consider what must I have been doing all my life not to have lent great portions of my heart with usury to such scenes?"

"What must I have been doing all my life?" This might well be the language of tender retrospect indulged by some man of sixty. It is that of a young man of six-and-twenty. It serves to show us how much of life had been crowded into those few years.

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CHAPTER IV.

DRAMATIC AUTHORSHIP AND DRAMATIC CRITICISM.

[1800-1809.]

LAMB was now established in his beloved Temple. For nearly nine years he and his sister resided in Mitre Court Buildings, and for about the same period afterwards within the same sacred precincts, in Inner Temple Lane. Of adventure, domestic or other, his biographer has henceforth little to relate. The track is marked on the one hand by his changes of residence and occasional brief excursions into the country, on the other by the books he wrote and the friendships he formed.

He had written to his friend Manning, as we have seen, how his acquaintance had increased of late. Of such acquaintances Manning himself is the most interesting to us, as having drawn from Lamb a series of letters by far the most important of those belonging to the period before us. Manning was a remarkable person, whose acquaintance Lamb had made on one of his visits to Cambridge during the residence at that University of his friend Lloyd. He was mathematical tutor at Caius, and, in addition to his scientific turn, was possessed by an enthusiasm which in later years he was able to turn to very practical purpose, for exploring the remoter parts of China and Thibet. Lamb had formed a strong admiration for Manning's gen-

ius. He told Crabb Robinson in after years that he was the most "wonderful man" he had ever met. Perhaps the circumstance of Manning's two chief interests in life being so remote from his own, drew Lamb to him by a kind of "sympathy of difference." Certainly he made very happy use of the opportunity for friendly banter thus afforded, and the very absence of a responsive humour in his correspondent seems to have imparted an additional richness to his own. Meantime, to add a few guineas to his scanty income, he was turning this gift of humour to what end he could. For at least three years (from 1800 to 1803) he was an occasional contributor of facetious paragraphs, epigrams, and other trifles to the newspapers of the day. "In those days," as he afterwards told the world in one of the Elia essays (*Newspapers Thirty-five Years Ago*), "every morning paper, as an essential retainer to its establishment, kept an author, who was bound to furnish daily a quantum of witty paragraphs. Sixpence a joke—and it was thought pretty high too—was Dan Stuart's settled remuneration in these cases. The chat of the day, scandal, but above all, *dress*, furnished the material. The length of no paragraph was to exceed seven lines. Shorter they might be, but they must be poignant." Dan Stuart was editor of the *Morning Post*, and Lamb contributed to this paper, and also to the *Chronicle* and the *Albion*. Six jokes a day was the amount he tells us he had to provide during his engagement on the *Post*, and in the essay just cited he dwells with much humour on the misery of rising two hours before breakfast (his days being otherwise fully employed at the India House) to elaborate his jests. "No Egyptian task-master ever devised a slavery like to that, our slavery. Half a dozen jests in a day (bating Sundays too), why, it seems nothing;

we make twice the number every day in our lives as a matter of course, and claim no sabbatical exemptions. But then they come into our head. But when the head has to go out to them, when the mountain must go to Mahomet!" A few samples of Lamb's work in this line have been preserved. One political squib has survived, chiefly perhaps as having served to give the *coup de grace* to a moribund journal, called the *Albion*, which had been only a few weeks before purchased ("on tick doubtless," Lamb says) by that light-hearted spendthrift, John Fenwick, immortalized in another of Lamb's essays (*The Two Races of Men*) as the typical *man who borrows*. The journal had been in daily expectation of being prosecuted, when a (not very scathing) epigram of Lamb's on the apostacy of Sir James Mackintosh, alienated the last of Fenwick's patrons, Lord Stanhope, and the "murky closet," "late Rackstraw's museum," in Fleet Street, knew the editor and his contributors no more. Lamb was not called upon to air his Jacobin principles, survivals from his old association with Coleridge and Southey, any further in the newspaper world. "The *Albion* is dead," he writes to Manning, "dead as nail in door—my revenues have died with it; but I am not as a man without hope." He had got a new introduction, through his old friend George Dyer, to the *Morning Chronicle*, under the editorship of Perry. In 1802 we find him again working for the *Post*, but in a different line. Coleridge was contributing to that paper, and was doing his best to obtain for Lamb employment on it of a more dignified character than providing the daily quantum of jokes. He had proposed to furnish Lamb with prose versions of German poems for the latter to turn into metre. Lamb had at first demurred, on the reasonable ground that Coleridge, whose gift of verse was

certainly equal to his own, might as easily do the whole process himself. But the pressure of pecuniary difficulty was great, and a fortnight later he is telling Coleridge that the experiment shall at least be tried. "As to the translations, let me do two or three hundred lines, and then do you try the nostrums upon Stuart in any way you please. If they go down, I will try more. In fact, if I got, or could but get, fifty pounds a year only, in addition to what I have, I should live in affluence." By dint of hard work, much against the grain, he contrived during the year that followed to make double the hoped-for sum; but humour and fancy produced to order could not but fail sooner or later. It came to an end some time in 1803. "The best and the worst to me," he writes to Manning in this year (Lamb rarely dates a letter), "is that I have given up two guineas a week at the *Post*, and regained my health and spirits, which were upon the wane. I grew sick, and Stuart unsatisfied. *Ludisti satis, tempus abire est*. I must cut closer, that's all."

While writing for the newspapers, he had not allowed worthier ambitions to cool. He was still thinking of success in very different fields. As early as the year 1799 he had submitted to Coleridge and Southey a five-act drama in blank verse, with the title of *Pride's Cure*, afterwards changed to *John Woodvil*. His two friends had urgently dissuaded him from publishing, and though he followed this advice, he had not abandoned the hope of seeing it one day upon the stage, and at Christmas of that year had sent it to John Kemble, then manager of Drury Lane. Nearly a year later, having heard nothing in the mean time from the theatre on the subject, he applied to Kemble to know his fate. The answer was returned that the manuscript was lost, and Lamb had to furnish a second copy.

Later, Kemble went so far as to grant the author a personal interview, but the final result was that the play was declined as unsuitable.

That Lamb should ever have dreamed of any other result may well surprise even those who have some experience of the attitude of a young author to his first drama. *John Woodvil* has no quality that could have made its success on the stage possible. It shows no trace of constructive skill, and the character-drawing is of the crudest. By a strange perverseness of choice, Lamb laid the scene of his drama, written in a language for the most part closely imitated from certain Elizabethan models, in the period of the Restoration, and with a strange carelessness introduced side by side with the imagery and rhythm of Fletcher and Massinger a diction often ludicrously incongruous. Perhaps the most striking feature of the play, regarded as a serious effort, is the entire want of keeping in the dialogue. Certain passages have been often quoted, such as that on which Lamb evidently prided himself most, describing the amusements of the exiled baronet and his son in the forest of Sherwood :

“To see the sun to bed, and to arise
Like some hot amourist with glowing eyes,
Bursting the lazy bands of sleep that bound him
With all his fires and travelling glories round him.

* * * * *

To view the leaves, thin dancers upon air,
Go eddying round, and small birds, how they fare,
When mother autumn fills their beaks with corn
Filched from the careless Amalthea's horn.”

They serve to show how closely Lamb's fancy and his ear were attuned to the music of Shakspeare and Shak-

speare's contemporaries; but the illusion is suddenly broken by scraps of dialogue sounding the depths of bathos:

"*Servant*.—Gentlemen, the fireworks are ready.

First Gent.—What be they?

Lovell.—The work of London artists, which our host has provided in honour of this day."

Or by such an image as that with which the play concludes, of the penitent John Woodvil, kneeling on the "hassock" in the "family-pew" of St. Mary Ottery, in the "sweet shire of Devon."

Lamb was not deterred by his failure with the managers from publishing his drama. It appeared in a small duodecimo in 1802; and when, sixteen years later, he included it in the first collected edition of his writings, dedicated to Coleridge, he was still able to look with a parent's tenderness upon this child of his early fancy. "When I wrote *John Woodvil*," he says, "Beaumont and Fletcher, and Massinger, were then a *first love*, and from what I was so freshly conversant in, what wonder if my language imperceptibly took a tinge?" This expresses, in fact, the real significance of the achievement. Though it is impossible seriously to weigh the merits of *John Woodvil* as a drama, it is yet of interest as the result of the studies of a young man of fine taste and independent judgment in a field of English literature which had lain long unexplored. Within a few years Charles Lamb was to contribute, by more effective methods, to the revived study of the Elizabethan drama, but in the mean time he was doing something, even in *John Woodvil*, to overthrow the despotic conventionalities of eighteenth-century "poetic diction," and to reaccustom the ear to the very different harmonies of an older time.

John Woodvil was noticed in the *Edinburgh Review* for April, 1803. Lamb might have been at that early date too insignificant, personally, to be worth the powder and shot of Jeffrey and his friends, but he was already known as the associate of Coleridge and Southey, and it was this circumstance—as the concluding words of the review rather unguardedly admit—that marked his little volume for the slaughter. He had been already held up to ridicule in the pages of the *Anti-Jacobin*, as sharing the revolutionary sympathies of Coleridge and Southey. It is certainly curious that Lamb, who never “meddled with politics,” home or foreign, any more than the *Anti-Jacobin’s* knife-grinder himself, should have his name embalmed in that periodical as a leading champion of French Socialism:

“Coleridge and Southey, Lloyd and Lamb and Co.,
Tune all your mystic harps to praise Lepeaux.”

There was abundant opportunity in Lamb’s play for the use of that scourge which the *Edinburgh Review* may be said to have first invented as a critical instrument. Plot and characters, and large portions of the dialogue, lent themselves excellently to the purposes of critical banter, and it was easy to show that Lamb had few qualifications for the task he had undertaken. As he himself observed in his essay on Hogarth: “It is a secret well known to the professors of the art and mystery of criticism, to insist upon what they do not find in a man’s works, and to pass over in silence what they do.” It was open to the reviewer to note, as even Lamb’s friend Southey noted, the “exquisite silliness of the story,” but it did not enter into his plan to detect, as Southey had done, the “exquisite beauty” of much of the poetry. The reason why it is worth while to dwell for a moment on this forgotten re-

view (not, by the way, by Jeffrey, although Lamb's friends seem generally to have attributed it to the editor's own hand) is that it shows how much Lamb was in advance of his reviewer in familiarity with our older literature. The review is a piece of pleasantry, of which it would be absurd to complain, but it is the pleasantry of an ignorant man. The writer affects to regard the play as a specimen of the primeval drama. "We have still among us," he says, "men of the age of Thespis," and declares that "the tragedy of Mr. Lamb may indeed be fairly considered as supplying the first of those lost links which connect the improvements of *Æschylus* with the commencement of the art." Talfourd expresses wonder that a young critic should "seize on a little eighteen-penny book, simply printed, without any preface: make elaborate merriment of its outline, and, giving no hint of its containing one profound thought or happy expression, leave the reader of the review at a loss to suggest a motive for noticing such vapid absurdities." But there is really little cause for such wonder. The one feature of importance in the little drama is that it here and there imitates with much skill the imagery and the rhythm of a family of dramatists whom the world had been content entirely to forget for nearly two centuries. There is no reason to suppose that Lamb's reviewer had any acquaintance with these dramatists. The interest of the review consists in the evidence it affords of a general ignorance, even among educated men, which Lamb was to do more than any man of his time to dispel. The passage about the sports in the forest, which set William Godwin (who met with it somewhere as an extract) searching through Beaumont and Fletcher to find, probably conveyed no idea whatever, to the *Edinburgh Reviewer*, save that which he honestly confessed, that here was

a specimen of versification which had been long ago improved from off the face of the earth.

In the summer of 1802 Charles and his sister spent their holiday, three weeks, with Coleridge at Keswick. The letters to Coleridge and Manning referring to this visit show pleasantly that there was something of affectation in the disparaging tone with which Charles was wont to speak of the charms of scenery. Though on occasion he would make his friends smile by telling that when he ascended Skiddaw he was obliged, in self-defence, to revert in memory to the ham-and-beef shop in St. Martin's Lane, it is evident from his enthusiastic words to Manning that the Lake scenery had moved and delighted him. "Coleridge dwells," he writes to Manning, "upon a small hill by the side of Keswick, in a comfortable house, quite enveloped on all sides by a net of mountains: great floundering bears and monsters they seemed, all couchant and asleep. We got in in the evening, travelling in a post-chaise from Penrith, in the midst of a gorgeous sunset which transmuted all the mountains into colours, purple, &c., &c. We thought we had got into Fairyland. But that went off (as it never came again, while we stayed we had no more fine sunsets); and we entered Coleridge's comfortable study just in the dusk, when the mountains were all dark with clouds upon their heads. Such an impression I never received from objects of sight before, nor do I suppose that I can ever again. Glorious creatures, fine old fellows, Skiddaw, &c., I never shall forget ye, how ye lay about that night, like an entrenchment; gone to bed, as it seemed for the night, but promising that ye were to be seen in the morning." And later, "We have clambered up to the top of Skiddaw, and I have waded up the bed of Lodore. In fine, I have satisfied myself that there is such a thing as that

which tourists call *romantic*, which I very much suspected before." And again, of Skiddaw, "Oh, its fine black head, and the bleak air atop of it, with a prospect of mountains all about and about, making you giddy; and then Scotland afar off, and the border countries so famous in song and ballad! It was a day that will stand out like a mountain, I am sure, in my life."

It is pleasant to read of these intervals of bracing air, both to body and mind, in the story of the brother and sister, for the picture of the home life in the Temple lodging at this time, drawn by the same frank hand, is anything but cheerful. This very letter to Manning (who was apparently spending his holiday in Switzerland) goes on to hint of grave anxieties and responsibilities belonging to the life in London. "My habits are changing, I think, *i. e.*, from drunk to sober. Whether I shall be happier or not remains to be proved. I shall certainly be more happy in a morning; but whether I shall not sacrifice the fat, and the marrow, and the kidneys—*i. e.*, the night, glorious care-drowning night, that heals all our wrongs, pours wine into our mortifications, changes the scene from indifferent and flat to bright and brilliant? O Manning, if I should have formed a diabolical resolution by the time you come to England, of not admitting any spirituous liquors into my house, will you be my guest on such shameful terms? Is life, with such limitations, worth trying? The truth is that my liquors bring a nest of friendly harpies about my house, who consume me. This is a pitiful tale to be read at St. Gothard, but it is just now nearest my heart."

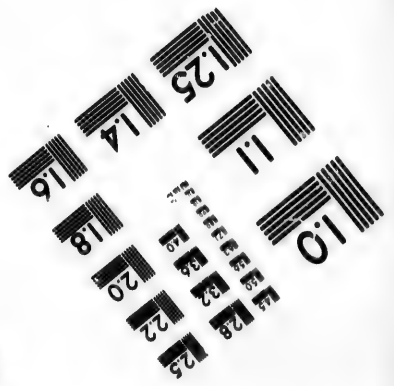
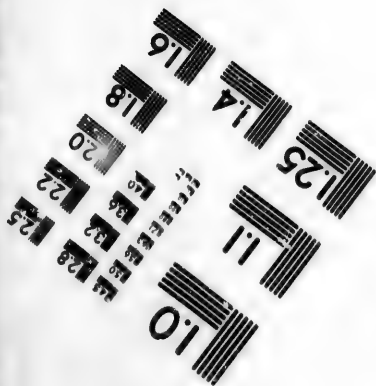
The tale is indeed a sad one, and we have no reason to suppose it less true than pitiful. There is no concealment on the part of Lamb himself, or his sister, or of those who knew him most intimately, of the fact that from an early

age Charles found in wine, or its equivalents, a stimulus that relieved him under the pressure of shyness, anxiety, and low spirits, and that the habit remained with him till the end of his life. It is not easy to deal with this "frailty" (to borrow Talfourd's expression) in Lamb, without falling into an apologetic tone, suggestive of the much-abused proverb connecting excuse with accusation. But it is the biographer's task to account for these things, if not to excuse them, and at this period there is not wanting evidence of hard trials attending the life of the brother and sister which may well prompt a treatment of the subject the reverse of harsh. There is a correspondence extant of Mary Lamb with Miss Stoddart, who afterwards became the wife of William Hazlitt, which throws much sad light on the history of the joint home during these years. The pressure of poverty was being keenly felt. "I hope, when I write next," she says, early in 1804, "I shall be able to tell you Charles has begun something which will produce a little money: for it is not well to be *very poor*, which we certainly are at this present writing." Charles' engagement as contributor of squibs and occasional paragraphs to the *Morning Post* had come to an end just before this letter of Mary's. But poverty was not the worst of the home troubles. It is too clear that both brother and sister suffered from constant and harassing depression, and that their heroic determination to live entirely for each other only made matters worse. "It has been sad and heavy times with us lately," Mary writes in the year following (1805). "When I am pretty well, his low spirits throw me back again; and when he begins to get a little cheerful, then I do the same kind office for him;" and again, "Do not say anything when you write, of our low spirits—it will vex Charles. You would laugh,





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or you would cry, perhaps both, to see us sit together, looking at each other with long and rueful faces, and saying 'How do you do?' and 'How do you do?' and then we fall a crying, and say we will be better on the morrow. He says we are like toothache and his friend gum-boil, which though a kind of ease, is but an uneasy kind of ease, a comfort of rather an uncomfortable sort." In the following year we gather that Charles, still bent on success in the drama as the most likely means of adding to his income, had begun to write a farce, and finding the gloom here described intolerable, in such an association, had taken a cheap lodging hard by to which he might retire, and pursue his work without distraction. But the more utter solitude proved as intolerable as the depressing influences of home. "The lodging," writes Mary Lamb, "is given up, and *here he is again*—Charles, I mean—as unsettled and as undetermined as ever. When he went to the poor lodging, after the holidays I told you he had taken, he could not endure the solitariness of them, and I had no rest for the sole of my foot till I promised to believe his solemn protestations that he could and would write as well at home as there."

There is a remark in this same letter, hardly more touching than it is indicative of the clear-sighted wisdom of this true-hearted woman. "Our love for each other," she writes, "has been the torment of our lives hitherto. I am most seriously intending to bend the whole force of my mind to counteract this, and I think I see some prospect of success." It doubtless was this strong affection, working by ill-considered means, that made much of the unhappiness of Charles Lamb's life. His sense of what he owed to his sister, who had been mother and sister in one, his admiration for her character, and his profound pity for her af-

fiction, made him resolve that no other tie, no other taste or pleasure, should interfere with the prime duty of cleaving to her as long as life should last. But this exclusive devotion was not a good thing for either. They wanted some strong human interests from outside to assist them to bear those of home. They were both fond of society. In their later more prosperous days they saw much society of a brilliant and notable sort, but already Charles had made the discovery that "open house" involved temptation of a kind he had not learnt to resist. The little suppers, at home and with friends elsewhere, meant too much punch and too much tobacco, and the inevitable sequel of depression and moroseness on the morrow. "He came home very *smoky and drinky* last night," is the frequent burden of Miss Lamb's letters. And so it came to pass that his social life was spent too much between these two extremes—the companionship of that one sister, anxiety for whose health was always pressing, and whose inherited instincts were too like his own, and the convivialities which banished melancholy for a while and set his fancy and his speech at liberty, but too often did *not* bear the morning's reflection. He needed at this time fewer companions, but more friends. Coleridge, Southey, Wordsworth, Manning, were all out of London, and only in his scanty holidays, or on occasion of their rare visits to town, could he take counsel with them.

One pleasant gleam of sunshine among the driving clouds of those years of anxiety is afforded in the lines on Hester Savary. During the few months that Lamb and his sister lodged at Pentonville in 1800, he had fallen in love (for the second and last time) with a young Quakeress. In sending the verses to Manning (in Paris) in 1803, Lamb recalls the old attachment as one his friend

would remember having heard him mention. However ardent it may have been, it was presumably without hope of requital, for Lamb admits that he had never spoken to the lady in his life. He may have met her daily in his walks to and from the office, or have watched her week by week on her way to that Quakers' meeting he has so lovingly described elsewhere. And now, only a month before, she had died, and Lamb's true vein, unspoiled by squibs and paragraphs written to order for party journals, flows once more in its native purity and sweetness:

"When maidens such as Hester die
Their place ye may not well supply,
Though ye among a thousand try
 With vain endeavour.
A month or more hath she been dead,
Yet cannot I by force be led
To think upon the wormy bed
 And her together.

"A springy motion in her gait,
A rising step, did indicate
Of pride and joy no common rate
 That flushed her spirit.
I know not by what name beside
I shall it call: if 'twas not pride,
It was a joy to that allied
 She did inherit.

"Her parents held the Quaker rule
Which doth the human spirit cool:
But she was trained in Nature's school,
 Nature had blest her.
A waking eye, a prying mind,
A heart that stirs, is hard to bind:
A hawk's keen sight ye cannot blind—
 Ye could not Hester.

"My sprightly neighbour, gone before
 To that unknown and silent shore,
 Shall we not meet, as heretofore,
 Some summer morning—
 When from thy cheerful eyes a ray
 Hath struck a bliss upon the day,
 A bliss that would not go away,
 A sweet fore-warning?"

These charming verses are themselves a "sweet fore-warning" of happier times to come. New friends were at hand, and new interests in literature were soon to bring a little cheerful relief to the monotony of the Temple lodging. We have already heard something of a play in preparation. The first intimation of Lamb's resolve to tempt dramatic fortune once again is in a letter to Wordsworth, in September, 1805. "I have done nothing," he writes, "since the beginning of last year, when I lost my newspaper job, and having had a long idleness, I must do something, or we shall get very poor. Sometimes I think of a farce, but hitherto all schemes have gone off; an idle brag or two of an evening, vapouring out of a pipe, and going off in the morning; but now I have bid farewell to my 'sweet enemy' tobacco, as you will see in the next page, I shall perhaps set nobly to work. Hang work!" He did set to work, in good heart, during the six months that followed. Mary Lamb's letters contain frequent references to the farce in progress, and before Midsummer, 1806, it was completed, and accepted by the proprietors of Drury Lane. The farce was the celebrated *Mr. H.*

No episode of Lamb's history is better known than the production, and the summary failure, of this *jeu d'esprit*. That it failed is no matter for surprise, and most certainly none for regret. Though it had the advantage, in its lead-

ing character, of the talent of Elliston, the best light-comedian of his day, the slightness of the interest (dealing with the inconveniences befalling a gentleman who is ashamed to confess that his real name is Hogsflesh) was too patent for the best acting to contend against. Crabb Robinson, one of Lamb's more recent friends, accompanied the brother and sister to the first and only performance, and received the impression that the audience resented the vulgarity of the name, when it was at last revealed, rather than the flimsiness of the plot. But the latter is quite sufficient to account for what happened. The curtain fell amid a storm of hisses, in which Lamb is said to have taken a conspicuous share. Indeed, his genuine critical faculty must have come to his deliverance when he thus viewed his own work from the position of an outsider. He expresses no surprise at the result, after the first few utterances of natural disappointment. The mortification must have been considerable. The brother and sister had looked forward to a success. They sorely needed the money it might have brought them, and Charles' deep-seated love of all things dramatic made success in that field a much cherished hope. But he bore his failure, as he bore all his disappointments in life, with a cheerful sweetness. He writes to Hazlitt: "Mary is a little cut at the ill-success of *Mr. H.*, which came out last night and *failed*. I know you'll be sorry, but never mind. We are determined not to be cast down. I am going to leave off tobacco, and then we must thrive. A smoky man must write smoky farces." It must be admitted that *Mr. H.* is not much better in reading than it was found in the acting. Its humour, consisting largely of puns and other verbal pleasantries, exhibits little or nothing of Lamb's native vein, and the dialogue is too often laboriously imitated from the conventional comedy-dialogue

then in vogue. But even had this been different, the lack of constructive ability already shown in *John Woodvil* must have made success as a writer for the stage quite beyond his reach.

He was on safer ground, though not perhaps working so thoroughly *con amore*, in another literary enterprise of this time. In 1805 he had made the acquaintance of William Hazlitt, and Hazlitt had introduced him to William Godwin. Godwin had started, as his latest venture, a series of books for children, to which he himself contributed under the name of Edward Baldwin. Lamb, writing to his friend Manning, in May, 1806, thus describes a joint task in which he and his sister were engaged in connexion with this scheme: "She is doing for Godwin's bookseller twenty of Shakspeare's plays, to be made into children's tales. Six are already done by her, to wit, *The Tempest*, *Winter's Tale*, *Midsummer Night*, *Much Ado*, *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, and *Cymbeline*; and the *Merchant of Venice* is in forwardness. I have done *Othello* and *Macbeth*, and mean to do all the tragedies. I think it will be popular among the little people, besides money. It's to bring in sixty guineas. Mary has done them capitally, I think you'd think." Mary herself supplements this account in a way that makes curiously vivid to us the homely realities of their joint life. She writes about the same time: "Charles has written *Macbeth*, *Othello*, *King Lear*, and has begun *Hamlet*. You would like to see us, as we often sit writing on one table (but not on one cushion sitting), like *Hermia* and *Helena*, in the *Midsummer Night's Dream*; or rather like an old literary Darby and Joan, I taking snuff, and he groaning all the while, and saying he can make nothing of it, which he always says till he has finished, and then he finds out he has made something of it." Writing

these *Tales from Shakspeare* was no doubt task-work to the brother and sister, but it was task-work on a congenial theme, and one for which they had special qualifications. They had, to start with, a profound and intimate acquaintance with their original, which set them at an infinite distance from the usual compilers of such books for children. They had, moreover, command of a style, Wordsworthian in its simplicity and purity, that enabled them to write down to the level of a child's understanding, without any appearance of condescension. The very homeliness of the style may easily divert attention from the rare critical faculty, the fine analysis of character, that marks the writers' treatment of the several plays. It is no wonder that the publisher in announcing a subsequent edition was able to boast that a book designed for young children had been found suitable for those of more advanced age. There is, indeed, no better introduction to the study of Shakspeare than these *Tales*—no better initiation into the mind of Shakspeare, and into the subtleties of his language and rhythm. For the ear of both Charles and Mary Lamb had been trained on the cadences of Elizabethan English, and they were able throughout to weave the very words of Shakspeare into their narrative without producing any effect of discrepancy between the old and the new.

The *Tales* were published in 1807, and were a success, a second edition appearing in the following year. One result of this success was a commission from Godwin to make another version of a great classic for the benefit of children, the story of the *Odyssey*. Lamb was no Greek scholar, but he had been, like Keats, stirred by the rough vigor of Chapman's translation. "Chapman is divine," he said afterwards to Bernard Barton, "and my abridgment has not quite emptied him of his divinity." And the few

words of preface with which he modestly introduced his little book as a supplement to that well-known school classic the *Adventures of Telemachus*, shows that the moral value of this record of human vicissitude had moved him not less than the variety of the adventure. "The picture which he exhibits," he writes, "is that of a brave man struggling with adversity; by a wise use of events and with an inimitable presence of mind under difficulties, forcing out a way for himself through the severest trials to which human life can be exposed; with enemies natural and supernatural surrounding him on all sides. The agents in this tale, besides men and women, are giants, enchanters, sirens; things which denote external force or internal temptations, the twofold danger which a wise fortitude must expect to encounter in its course through this world." We cannot be wrong in judging that Charles Lamb had seen in this "wisdom of the ancients" an image of sirens and enchanters, of trials and disciplines, that beset the lonely dweller at home not less surely than the wanderer from city to city, and had found therein something of a cordial and a tonic for himself. No one felt more repugnance than did Lamb to the appending of a formal moral to a work of art, to use his own comparison, like the "God send the good ship safe into harbour" at the end of a bill of lading. But it was to be his special note as a critic that he could not keep his human compassion from blending with his judgment of every work of human imagination. If his strength as a critic was—and remains for us—as the "strength of ten," it was because his heart was pure.

To what masterly purpose he had been long training this faculty of criticism he was now about to show. The letter to Manning, which tells of his *Adventures of Ulysses*,

announces a more important undertaking—apparently a commission from the firm of Longman—*Specimens of English Dramatic Poets contemporary with Shakspeare*. “Specimens,” he writes, “are becoming fashionable. We have *Specimens of Ancient English Poets*, *Specimens of Modern English Poets*, *Specimens of Ancient English Prose Writers*, without end. They used to be called ‘Beauties.’ You have seen *Beauties of Shakspeare*? so have many people that never saw any beauties in Shakspeare.” But Lamb’s method was to have little in common with that of the unfortunate Dr. Dodd. “It is to have notes,” is the brief mention of that feature of the collection which was at once to place their author in the first rank of critics. The commentary, often extending to no more than a dozen or twenty lines appended to each scene, or each author chosen for illustration, was of a kind new to a generation accustomed to the *Variorum* school of annotator. It contains no philology, no antiquarianism, no discussion of difficult or corrupt passages. It takes its character from the principle set forth in the Preface on which the selection of scenes is made :

“The kind of extracts which I have sought after have been, not so much passages of wit and humour—though the old plays are rich in such—as scenes of passion, sometimes of the deepest quality, interesting situations, serious descriptions, that which is more nearly allied to poetry than to wit, and to tragic rather than comic poetry. The plays which I have made choice of have been with few exceptions those which treat of human life and manners, rather than masques and Arcadian pastorals, with their train of abstractions, unimpassioned deities, passionate mortals, Claius, and Medorus, and Amintas, and Amaryllis. My leading design has been to illustrate what may be called the moral sense of our ancestors. To show in what manner they felt when they placed themselves by the power of imagination in trying situations, in the conflicts of duty and passion, or the strife of contending duties; what sort of loves and enmi-

ties theirs were; how their griefs were tempered, and their full-swoln joys abated; how much of Shakspeare shines in the great men his contemporaries, and how far in his divine mind and manners he surpassed æm and all mankind."

The very idea of the collection was a bold one. When we cast our eye over the list of now familiar names, Marlowe and Peele, Marston, Chapman, Ford, and Webster, from whom Lamb chose his scenes, we must not forget that he was pleading their merits before a public which knew them only as names, if it knew them at all. With the one exception of Shakspeare, the dramatists of the period, between "the middle of Elizabeth's reign and the close of the reign of Charles I.," were unknown to the general reader of the year 1808. Shakspeare, indeed, had a permanent stage-existence—that best of commentaries which fine acting supplies, to which Lamb himself had been from childhood so largely indebted. But for those who studied him in the closet there was no aid to his interpretation save such as was supplied by the very unilluminating notes of Johnson or Malone. And this circumstance must be taken into account if we would rightly estimate the genius of Lamb. As a critic he had no master—it might almost be said, no predecessor. He was the inventor of his own art. As the friend of Coleridge, he might have heard something of that school of dramatic criticism of which Lessing was the founder, but there is little trace of any such influence in Lamb's own critical method. And though, three years later, Coleridge was to make another contribution of value to the same cause, in the Lectures on Shakspeare delivered at the London Philosophical Society, it is likely that his obligations were at least as great to Lamb, as those of Lamb had ever been, in the same field, to Coleridge.

The suggestion in the preface, already cited, of Shakspeare as the representative dramatist, the standard by which his contemporaries must be content to be judged, is amply followed up in the notes, and gives a unity of its own to a collection so miscellaneous. I may refer, as examples, to the masterly distinction drawn between the use made of the supernatural by Middleton in the *Witch*, and by Shakspeare in *Macbeth*, and again to the contrast indicated between the dirge in Webster's *White Devil* and the "ditty which reminds Ferdinand of his drowned father in the *Tempest*"—"as that is of the water, watery; so is this of the earth, earthy. Both have that intenseness of feeling which seems to resolve itself into the elements which it contemplates"—a criticism which could only have been conceived by one who was himself a poet. How admirably, again, does he draw attention (in a note on the *Merry Devil of Edmonton*) to that feature of Shakspeare's genius which perhaps more than any other is forced upon the reader's mind as he turns from passage to passage in this collection: "This scene has much of Shakspeare's manner in the sweetness and good-naturedness of it. It seems written to make the reader happy. Few of our dramatists or novelists have attended enough to this. They torture and wound us abundantly. They are economists only in delight." Nothing, again, can be more profound than his remark on the elaborate and ostentatious saintliness of Ordella (in Fletcher's *Thierry and Theodore*). "Shakspeare had nothing of this contortion in his mind, none of that craving after romantic incidents, and flights of strained and improbable virtue, which I think always betray an imperfect moral sensibility." And yet though Lamb's fine judgment approved the fidelity to nature, and the artistic self-control, which he here empha-

sises in his great model, it is clear that the audacious conceptions, both of character and situation, in which writers such as Ford and Tournour indulged, had no small fascination for him. As he recalled the dreary types of virtue, the "insipid levelling morality to which the modern stage is tied down," he turned with joy—as from a heated saloon into the fresh air—to the "vigorous passions," the "virtues clad in flesh and blood," with which the old dramatists presented him. And this joy in the presentment of the naked human soul is felt throughout all his criticisms on the more terrible scenes of Shakspeare's successors. His "ears tingle," or his eyes fill, or his heart leaps within him, as Calantha dies of her broken heart, or Webster's Duchess yields slowly to the torture. Hence it is that Lamb's criticism as often takes the form of a study of human life as of the dramatist's art. And hence also the effect he often leaves of having indulged in praise too great for the occasion. There is, moreover, another reason for this last-named result, which was inseparable from Lamb's method. No two dramatists can be measured by comparing passage with passage, scene with scene. Shakspeare and Marlowe cannot be compared or contrasted by setting the death of Edward II. side by side with that of Richard II. Drama must be put side by side with drama. Lamb does not indeed suggest, by anything that he says, that the rank of a dramatist can be decided by passages or extracts. Only it did not enter into his scheme to dwell upon that supreme art of construction, and that highest gift of characterization, which are needed to make the perfect dramatist. In "profoundness of single thoughts," in "richness of imagery," in "abundance of illustration," he could produce passage after passage from Shakspeare's contemporaries that evinced genius nearly al-

lied to Shakspeare's; but of that "fundamental excellence" which "distinguishes the artist from the mere amateur, that power of execution which creates, forms, and constitutes," it was not possible for him to supply example. And this reservation the student must be prepared to make, who would approach the study of the Elizabethan Drama by the aid of Charles Lamb's specimens.

But, whatever qualification must be interposed, it is certain that the publication of these extracts, and the accompanying commentary, has a well-defined place in the poetical renaissance that marked the early years of this century. The revived study of the old English dramatists—other than Shakspeare—dates from this publication. Coleridge had not yet begun to lecture, nor Hazlitt to write, and it was not till some twenty years later that Mr. Dyce began his different, but not less important, labours in the same field. To Lamb must be allowed the credit of having first recalled attention to a range of poetical excellence, in forgetfulness of which English poetry had too long pined and starved. It was to these mountain-heights of inspiration—not to the cultivated lowlands of the eighteenth century—that Poetry was to turn her eyes for help.

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CHAPTER V.

INNER TEMPLE LANE.—PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS.

[1809-1817.]

TALFOURD made the acquaintance of Charles Lamb early in the year 1815, and has recorded the impression left by his appearance and manner at that time in words which at this stage of our memoir it may be convenient to quote. Lamb has been fortunate in his verbal describers, if not in the attempts of the painter's art to convey a true idea of his outward man. Leigh Hunt has declared that "there never was a true portrait of Lamb"—and those who take the trouble to examine in succession the half-dozen portraits that are in existence are obliged to admit that it is difficult to derive from them any consistent idea of his features and expression. But it so happens that we have full-length portraits of him drawn by other hands, which more than compensate for this want. Poets, critics, and humourists, of kindred genius, have left on record how Charles Lamb appeared to them; and though the various accounts bear, as might be expected, the strong impress of their writers' individuality, and though each naturally gives most prominence to the traits that struck him most, the final impression left is one of agreement, in remarkable degree. We have descriptions of Lamb, all possessing points of great interest, by Tal-

fourd, Procter, Hood, Patmore, and others, and from these it is possible to learn how their subject looked and spoke and bore himself, with a precision and vividness that we are seldom in such cases allowed to enjoy. I have the advantage of being able to confirm their accounts by the testimony of a living witness. Mr. James Crossley, of Manchester, has related to me his recollections of more than one interview which he had with Lamb, nearly sixty years ago, and has kindly allowed me to make use of them.

Talfourd's reminiscence, committed to writing shortly after Lamb's death, if slightly idealized by his own poetic temperament, is not for that reason a less satisfactory basis on which to form a conception of Charles Lamb's appearance. "Methinks I see him before me now, as he appeared then, and as he continued with scarcely any perceptible alteration to me, during the twenty years of intimacy which followed, and were closed by his death. A light frame, so fragile that it seemed as if a breath would overthrow it, clad in clerk-like black, was surmounted by a head of form and expression the most noble and sweet. His black hair curled crisply about an expanded forehead; his eyes, softly brown, twinkled with varying expression, though the prevalent feeling was sad; and the nose slightly curved, and delicately carved at the nostril, with the lower outline of the face regularly oval, completed a head which was finely placed on the shoulders, and gave importance and even dignity to a diminutive and shadowy stem. Who shall describe his countenance, catch its quivering sweetness, and fix it for ever in words? There are none, alas, to answer the vain desire of friendship. Deep thought, striving with humour; the lines of suffering wreathed into cordial mirth; and a smile of painful sweet-

ness, present an image to the mind it can as little describe as lose. His personal appearance and manner are not unfitly characterized by what he himself says in one of his letters to Manning, of Braham, 'a compound of the Jew, the gentleman, and the angel.'

From this tender and charming sketch it is instructive to turn to the rude etching on copper made by Mr. Brook Pulham from life, in the year 1825, which in the opinion of Lamb's biographers (and Mr. Crossley confirms their judgment) gives a better idea than all other existing portraits of Charles Lamb's outward man. The small stature—he was very noticeably below the middle height—the head apparently out of proportion to the slender frame, the Jewish cast of nose, the long black hair, the figure dwindling away down to "almost immaterial legs," the tight-fitting clerk-like suit of black, terminating in gaiters and straps, all these appear in Mr. Pulham's etching in such bold realism that the portrait might easily pass for a caricature, were it not confirmed in all its details by other authorities. Mr. Crossley recalls with perfect distinctness the aspect of Lamb as he sat at his desk in his room at the India House, looking the more diminutive for being perched upon a very high stool. His hair and complexion were so dark, that when looked at in combination with the complete suit of solemn black, they suggested old Fuller's description of the negro, of which Lamb was so fond—an image "cut in ebony." He might have passed, Hood tells us, for a "Quaker in black." "He had a long melancholy face," says Mr. Procter, "with keen penetrating eyes." "There was altogether," Mr. Patmore says, "a Rabbinical look about Lamb's head which was at once striking and impressive." But the feature of his expression that all his friends dwell on with

most loving emphasis is "the bland sweet smile, with the touch of sadness in it;" and Mr. Patmore's description of the general impression produced by this countenance well sums up and confirms the testimony of all other friends: "In point of intellectual character and expression, a finer face was never seen, nor one more fully, however vaguely corresponding with the mind whose features it interpreted. There was the gravity usually engendered by a life passed in book learning, without the slightest tinge of that assumption and affectation which almost always attend the gravity so engendered; the intensity and elevation of general expression that mark high genius, without any of its pretension and its oddity; the sadness waiting on fruitless thoughts and baffled aspirations, but no evidence of that spirit of scorning and contempt which these are apt to engender. Above all there was a pervading sweetness and gentleness which went straight to the heart of every one who looked on it; and not the less so, perhaps, that it bore about it an air, a something, seeming to tell that it was—not *put on*—for nothing would be more unjust than to tax Lamb with assuming anything, even a virtue, which he did not possess—but preserved and persevered in, spite of opposing and contradictory feelings within that struggled in vain for mastery. It was a thing to remind you of that painful smile which bodily disease and agony will sometimes put on, to conceal their sufferings from the observation of those they love."

We know Charles Lamb's history, and have not to ask for any explanation of the appearances thus described. He had always (it must not be forgotten) to contend against sad memories, and anticipations of further sorrow. He was by nature "terribly shy," and his difficulties of speech, and possibly a consciousness of oddity of manner and ap-

pearance, aggravated this diffidence. It was "terrible" to him—as he confessed to Mr. Procter one morning when they were going together to breakfast with Rogers—to undergo the scrutiny of servants. Hence only at times, and in certain companies, was he entirely at his ease; and it is evident that, when in the society of those in sympathy with him and his tastes, he conveyed an entirely different impression of himself from that left under the opposite circumstances. Before strangers, or uncongenial acquaintance, he was uncomfortable, and if not actually silent, generally indulged in some line of conversation or vein of sentiment foreign to his own real nature. Like most men, Charles Lamb had various oddnesses, contradictions, perversenesses of temper, and unless he was in company of those who loved him (and who he *knew* loved him), and understood him, he was very prone, in a spirit of what children call "contrariness," to set to work to alienate them still more from any possibility of sympathy with him. Something of this must of course be laid to the account of the extra glass of wine or spirits that so often determined his mood for the evening, only that when Procter, or Talfourd, or Coleridge, or Hazlitt were round his hospitable table, this stimulus served but to set free the richer and more generous springs of thought and fancy within him. I have the authority of Mr. Crossley for saying that on one evening when in manner, speech, and walk Lamb was obviously under the influence of what he had drunk, he discoursed at length upon Milton, with a fulness of knowledge, an eloquence, and a profundity of critical power, which left an impression upon Mr. Crossley never to be effaced. But we know that the wine was not in this case the good, any more than on other occasions it was the evil, influence. "*It created nothing,*" says

Mr. Patmore, "but it was the talisman that not only unlocked the poor casket in which the rich thoughts of Charles Lamb were shut up, but set in motion that machinery in the absence of which they would have lain like gems in the mountain or gold in the mine." But where the society was unsympathetic, the wine often set free less lovable springs of fancy in Charles Lamb. He would take up a perverse attitude of contradiction, with too slight regard for the courtesies of human intercourse, or else give play to a mere spirit of reckless and not very edifying mockery. The same enthusiastic friend and admirer just quoted is obliged to admit that "to those who did not know him, or knowing, did not and could not appreciate him, Lamb often passed for something between an imbecile, a brute, and a buffoon; and the first impression he made on ordinary people was always unfavourable, sometimes to a violent and repulsive degree." Many persons have of late been startled by the discovery that Lamb sometimes left the same impression upon people the reverse of ordinary. Nothing perhaps in the *Reminiscences of Thomas Carlyle* has provoked so much surprise, and hurt so many feelings, as his passing criticism upon Lamb. And yet it is entirely supported and explained by Mr. Patmore's observation. No two persons could have been more antipathetic than Lamb and Carlyle, and nothing therefore is less surprising than that to the author of the *Latter-Day Pamphlets* Charles and his sister should have appeared two very "sorry phenomena," or that the scraps of Lamb's talk which he overheard during a passing call should often have seemed "contemptibly small," "ghastly make-believe of wit," and the rest. There is no need to question the substantial justice of this report. It is only too probable that the presence of the austere and dyspeptic Scotchman (one of that

nation Lamb had all his days been trying in vain to like) made him more than usually disposed to produce his entire stock of frivolity. He had a perverse delight in shocking uncongenial society. Another noticeable person—very different in all respects from Carlyle—has left a record, significant by its very brevity, of his single interview with Lamb. Macready tells in his diary how he was asked to meet him at Talfourd's, and this is what he records of the interview: "I noted one odd saying of Lamb's, that 'the last breath he drew in he wished might be through a pipe, and exhaled in a pun.'" Lamb may have discovered at a glance that he and the great tragedian were not likely to take the same views of men and things. Perhaps his love both for joking and smoking had struck Macready the reverse of favourably, and if so, it was quite in Lamb's way to clench once for all the unfavourable impression by such an "odd saying" as that just quoted.

Charles Lamb has drawn for us a character of himself, but, so fond was he of hoaxes and mystifications of this kind, that we might have hesitated to accept it as faithful, were it not in such precise accord with the testimony of others already cited. The second series of the *Essays of Elia* was introduced by a preface, purporting to be written "by a friend of the late Elia," but of course from Charles' own hand. In this preface he assumes Elia to have actually died, and after some preliminary remarks on his writings thus proceeds to describe his character and manners:

"My late friend was in many respects a singular character. Those who did not like him, hated him; and some, who once liked him, afterwards became his bitterest haters. The truth is, he gave himself too little concern what he uttered, and in whose presence. He observed neither time nor place, and would e'en out with what

came uppermost. With the severe religionist he would pass for a free-thinker; while the other faction set him down for a bigot, or persuaded themselves that he belied his sentiments. Few understood him, and I am not certain that at all times he quite understood himself. He too much affected that dangerous figure—irony. He sowed doubtful speeches, and reaped plain unequivocal hatred. He would interrupt the gravest discussion with some light jest; and yet, perhaps, not quite irrelevant in ears that could understand it. Your long and much talkers hated him. The informal habit of his mind, joined to an inveterate impediment of speech, forbade him to be an orator; and he seemed determined that no one else should play that part when he was present. He was *petit* and ordinary in his person and appearance. I have seen him sometimes in what is called good company, but where he has been a stranger, sit silent and be suspected for an odd fellow; till some unlucky occasion provoking it, he would stutter out some senseless pun (not altogether senseless, perhaps, if rightly taken) which has stamped his character for the evening. It was hit or miss with him; but nine times out of ten he contrived by this device to send away a whole company his enemies. His conceptions rose kindlier than his utterance, and his happiest *impromptus* had the appearance of effort. He has been accused of trying to be witty, when in truth he was but struggling to give his poor thoughts articulation. He chose his companions for some individuality of character which they manifested. Hence not many persons of science, and few professed *literati*, were of his councils. They were, for the most part, persons of an uncertain fortune; and as to such people commonly nothing is more obnoxious than a gentleman of settled (though moderate) income, he passed with most of them for a great miser. To my knowledge this was a mistake. His *intimados*, to confess a truth, were in the world's eye a ragged regiment. He found them floating on the surface of society; and the colour, or something else, in the weed pleased him. The burrs stuck to him; but they were good and loving burrs for all that. He never greatly cared for the society of what are called good people. If any of these were scandalized (and offences were sure to arise) he could not help it. When he has been remonstrated with for not making more concessions to the feelings of good people, he would retort by asking what one point did these good people ever concede to him? He was temperate in his meals and diversions, but always kept a

little on this side of abstemiousness. Only in the use of the Indian weed he might be thought a little excessive. He took it, he would say, as a solvent of speech. Marry—as the friendly vapour ascended, how his prattle would curl up sometimes with it! the ligaments which tongue-tied him were loosened, and the stammerer proceeded a statish!"

When a man's account of himself—his foibles and eccentricities—is confirmed in minutest detail by those who knew and loved him best, it is reasonable to conclude that we are not far wrong in accepting it, and this self-portraiture of Lamb's gives an unexpected plausibility to the judgments, which otherwise have a harsh sound, of Mr. Patmore and Carlyle. The peculiarities which Lamb here enumerates are just those which are little likely ever to receive gentle consideration from the world.

Lamb's mention of the "senseless pun" which often "stamped his character for the evening," suggests opportunely the subject of his reputation as a humourist and wit. This habit of playing upon words was a part of him through life, and, as in the case of most who indulge in it, became an outlet for whatever mood was for the moment dominant in Charles Lamb's mind. When he was ill at ease, and in an attitude (as he often was) of antagonism to his company, it would take the shape of a wanton interruption of the argument under discussion. To use a simile of Mr. Oliver Wendell Holmes, it was the halfpenny laid upon the line by a mischievous boy to upset a whole train of cars. When he was annoyed, he made annoying puns; when he was frivolous, he made frivolous puns; but when he was in the cue, and his surroundings were such as to call forth his better powers, he put into this form of wit humour and imagination of a high order. Samples of all these kinds have been pre-

served, and are not without use as showing the various moods of his many-sided nature, but it is pitiable to read long strings of them, set down without any discrimination, and to be asked to accept them as specimens of Lamb's "wit and humour." Many of his jests thus handed down are little more than amusing evidence of a restless levity, and almost petulant impatience of the restraints of serious discourse. Much of his conversational humour took the form of retort—courteous, or the reverse. Sometimes these embodied a criticism so luminous or acute that they have survived, not only for their drollery, or even their severity. "Charles, did you ever hear me preach?" asked Coleridge, referring to the days of his Unitarian ministry. "I never heard you do anything else," was the reply. When Wordsworth was discussing with him the degree of originality to be allowed to Shakspeare, as borrowing his plots from sources ready to his hand, and was even hinting that other poets, with the *History of Hamlet* before them, might have been equally successful in adapting it to the stage, Charles cried out, "Oh! here's Wordsworth says he could have written *Hamlet*, if *he'd had the mind*." In both these cases the retort embodies a felicitous judgment. A foible—if in either case it is to be called a foible—in the character of the two poets, respectively, flashes out into sudden light. The pun is more than a pun; the wit is more than wit; it is a sudden glory of truth kindled by the imagination. Lamb's wide reading and memory give a peculiar flavour to much of his wit. He had a way of applying quotations which is all his own. When Crabb Robinson, then a new-fledged barrister, told him of his sensations on getting his first brief in the King's Bench, "I suppose," said Charles, "you said to it, 'Thou great First Cause, least understood.'" Somebody remarking on

Shakspeare's anachronisms—clocks and watches in *Julius Cæsar*, oracles of Delphi in the *Winter's Tale*—he said he supposed that was what Dr. Johnson meant when he wrote of him that "panting Time toiled after him in vain." Hood records a visit paid by him to the Lambs when they were living at Islington, with a wasp's nest near their front door. "He was one day bantering my wife on her dread of wasps, when all at once he uttered a terrible shout—a wounded specimen of the species had slyly crawled up the leg of the table, and stung him in the thumb. I told him it was a refutation well put in, like Smollett's timely snow-ball. 'Yes,' said he, 'and a stinging commentary on Macbeth—

""By the pricking of my thumbs,
Something wicked this way comes.""

Readers of the *Essays of Elia* will recall many happy effects produced by this novel use of familiar quotations. Not that he ever condescended to degrade a really fine passage by any vulgar associations. No great harm was done (in the "Essay on Roast Pig") by calling in his friend's "Epitaph on an Infant" to justify the sacrifice of the innocent suckling, before it should "grow up to the grossness and indocility which too often accompany maturer swinehood—

""Ere sin could blight or sorrow fade
Death came with timely care.""

And, now and then, with the true instinct of a poet, he throws a new and lasting halo over a homely object by associating it with one more poetic and dignified, as when in the "Praise of Chimney-sweepers" he notes the brilliant white of the little climbing-boys' teeth peering from between their sooty lips. "It is," he adds—

“as when a sable cloud
Turns forth her silver lining on the night,”

an application of Milton which is only *not* witty (to borrow Sydney Smith's skilful distinction) because the enjoyment of its wit is overpowered by our admiration of its beauty.

“Specimens of wit and humour” afford, under the happiest conditions, but melancholy reading, and none can less well afford to be separated from their context than those of Lamb. And in his case the context is not merely that of the written or spoken matter, but that of the man himself—his look, manner, and habits. To understand how his drollery affected those who were present, and made them anxious to preserve some record of it, it is necessary to keep in mind how he looked and spoke, his odd face, his stammer, and his wilfulness in the presence of uncongenial natures. There is a diverting scene recorded in the diary of Haydon, the painter, which, however amplified by Haydon's facile pen, seems to bring before us “an evening with Charles Lamb” with more reality than the general recollections of Talfourd and Procter. Something of the “diluted insanity” that so shocked Mr. Carlyle is here shadowed forth. Haydon had got up a little dinner, on occasion of Wordsworth being in town (December, 1817), and Lamb and Keats were of the party. The account must be given in his own words:

“On December 28th the immortal dinner came off in my painting-room, with Jerusalem towering up behind us as a background. Wordsworth was in fine cue, and we had a glorious set-to—on Homer, Shakspeare, Milton, and Virgil. Lamb got exceedingly merry, and exquisitely witty; and his fun, in the midst of Wordsworth's solemn intonations of oratory, was like the sarcasm and wit of the Fool in the intervals of Lear's passion. He made a speech and voted

me absent, and made them drink my health. 'Now,' said Lamb, 'you old lake poet, you rascally poet, why do you call Voltaire dull?' We all defended Wordsworth, and affirmed there was a state of mind when Voltaire would be dull. 'Well,' said Lamb, 'here's Voltaire—the Messiah of the French nation—and a very proper one, too.

"He then in a strain of humour beyond description abused me for putting Newton's head into my picture—'a fellow,' said he, 'who believed nothing unless it was as clear as the three sides of a triangle.' And then he and Keats agreed that he had destroyed all the poetry of the rainbow, by reducing it to the prismatic colours. It was impossible to resist him, and we all drank 'Newton's health, and confusion to mathematics.' It was delightful to see the good-humour of Wordsworth in giving in to all our frolics without affectation, and laughing as heartily as the best of us.

"By this time other friends joined, amongst them poor Ritchie, who was going to penetrate by Fezzan to Timbuctoo. I introduced him to all as 'a gentleman going to Africa.' Lamb seemed to take no notice; but all of a sudden he roared out, 'Which is the gentleman we are going to lose?' We then drank the victim's health, in which Ritchie joined.

"In the morning of this delightful day, a gentleman, a perfect stranger, had called on me. He said he knew my friends, had an enthusiasm for Wordsworth, and begged I would procure him the happiness of an introduction. He told me he was a Comptroller of Stamps, and often had correspondence with the poet. I thought it a liberty; but still, as he seemed a gentleman, I told him he might come.

"When we retired to tea we found the Comptroller. In introducing him to Wordsworth I forgot to say who he was. After a little time the Comptroller looked down, looked up, and said to Wordsworth, 'Don't you think, sir, Milton was a great genius?' Keats looked at me, Wordsworth looked at the Comptroller. Lamb, who was dozing by the fire, turned round and said, 'Pray, sir, did you say Milton was a great genius?' 'No, sir; I asked Mr. Wordsworth if he were not.' 'Oh,' said Lamb, 'then you are a silly fellow.' 'Charles! my dear Charles!' said Wordsworth. But Lamb, perfectly innocent of the confusion he had created, was off again by the fire.

"After an awful pause the Comptroller said, 'Don't you think

Newton a great genius?' I could not stand it any longer. Keats put his head into my books. Ritchie squeezed in a laugh. Wordsworth seemed asking himself, 'Who is this?' Lamb got up and, taking a candle, said, 'Sir, will you allow me to look at your phrenological development?' He then turned his back on the poor man, and at every question of the Comptroller he chanted—

““Diddle, diddle, dumpling, my son John
Went to bed with his breeches on.””

The man in office finding Wordsworth did not know who he was, said in a spasmodic and half-chuckling anticipation of assured victory, 'I have had the honour of some correspondence with you, Mr. Wordsworth.' 'With me, sir?' said Wordsworth, 'not that I remember' 'Don't you, sir? I am a Comptroller of Stamps.' There was a dead silence; the Comptroller evidently thinking that was enough. While we were waiting for Wordsworth's reply, Lamb sung out—

““Hey diddle diddle,
The cat and the fiddle.””

'My dear Charles!' said Wordsworth.

““Diddle, diddle, dumpling, my son John,””

chanted Lamb; and then rising, exclaimed, 'Do let me have another look at that gentleman's organs.' Keats and I hurried Lamb into the painting-room, shut the door, and gave way to inextinguishable laughter. Monkhouse followed and tried to get Lamb away. We went back, but the Comptroller was irreconcilable. We soothed and smiled, and asked him to supper. He stayed, though his dignity was sorely affected. However, being a good-natured man, we parted all in good-humour, and no ill effects followed.

"All the while, until Monkhouse succeeded, we could hear Lamb struggling in the painting-room and calling at intervals, 'Who is that fellow? Allow me to see his organs once more.'"

It is not difficult to guess how Carlyle or Macready would have commented on this scene, had they been present.

But the Wednesday evenings when Charles and Mary

Lamb kept open house—if the term could be applied to the slender resources of the garret in Inner Temple Lane—produced something better in the way of intellectual result than the above. Talfourd and Procter have told us the names and qualities of the guests who gathered about the Lambs on these occasions, and the homely fare and the cordial greeting that awaited them—the low, dingy rooms, with books and prints for their chief furniture, the two tables set out for whist, and the cold beef and can of porter on the sideboard, to which each guest helped himself as he chose. On these occasions would be found Wordsworth and Coleridge when in town, and then the company resolved themselves willingly into a band of contented listeners; but at other times no difference of rank would be recognized, and poets and critics, painters, journalists, barristers, men in public offices, dramatists, and actors met on terms of unchallenged equality. Hazlitt has made an attempt, in a well-known essay, to reproduce an actual conversation at which he was present on one of these Wednesdays. He admits that, writing twenty years after the event, memory was ill able to recall the actual words of the speakers. But even when allowance is made for the lapse of time, it is hard to believe that Hazlitt had much of the Boswellian faculty. The subject that had been discussed was “Persons one would wish to have seen.” Isaac Newton and Locke, Shakspeare and Milton, and many others, were suggested, and all dismissed for one reason or another by Lamb. Sir Thomas Browne and Fulke Greville were two he substituted for these. But it is impossible to accept the following sentence as a sample of Lamb’s conversational manner: “When I look at that obscure but gorgeous prose composition, the *Urn Burial*, I seem to myself to look into a deep abyss, at

the bottom of which are hid pearls and rich treasure; or, it is like a stately labyrinth of doubt and withering speculation, and I would invoke the spirit of the author to lead me through it." This style is equally unlike that of essay and letter, and nothing so pointless and so grandiose, we are sure, ever proceeded from his lips. It was not so that Lamb, as Haydon expressed it, "stuttered out his quaintness in snatches, like the Fool in *Lea*r." But we can distinguish that stammering tongue, if we listen, above the din of the supper party and the whist-table—(not rigorous as Mrs. Battle's)—ranging from the maddest drollery to the subtlest criticism, calling out to Martin Burney, "Martin, if dirt were trumps, what a hand you'd have!"—or declaring that he had once known a young man who "wanted to be a tailor, but hadn't the spirit"—or pronouncing, *à propos* of the water-cure, that it was neither new nor wonderful, for that it was at least as old as the Flood, when, "in *his* opinion," it killed more than it cured. We can hear him drawing some sound distinction, as between the ingrained jealousy of Leontes and the mere credulity of Othello, or contrasting the noble simplicity of the *Nut-Brown Maid* with Prior's vapid paraphrase, in *Henry and Emma*. We can listen to him as he fearlessly decried all his friends' idols of the hour, Byron or Shelley or Goethe, and raved with something of a perverse enthusiasm over some forgotten worthy of the sixteenth century. We can hear him pleading for the "divine compliments" of Pope, and repeating, with a faltering voice, the well-known lines:

• Happy my studies, when by these approved !
Happier their author, when by these beloved !
From these the world will judge of men and books,
Not from the Burnets, Oldmixons, and Cookes."

It was this range of sympathy, yet coupled with such strange limitations—this alternation of tenderness and frolic—of scholarly fulness and luminous insight, that drew the poet and the critic, as well as the boon companion, to Lamb's Wednesday nights.

Lamb's letters at this time afford excellent specimens of his drollery and high animal spirits. The following was addressed to Manning early in 1810. Manning was then in China:

"DEAR MANNING,—When I last wrote you I was in lodgings. I am now in chambers, No. 4, Inner Temple Lane, where I should be happy to see you any evening. Bring any of your friends, the mandarins, with you. I have two sitting-rooms; I call them so *par excellence*, for you may stand, or loll, or lean, or try any posture in them, but they are best for sitting; not squatting down Japanese fashion, but the more decorous mode which European usage has consecrated. I have two of these rooms on the third floor, and five sleeping, cooking, &c., rooms on the fourth floor. In my best room is a choice collection of the works of Hogarth, an English painter of some humour. In my next best are shelves, containing a small but well-chosen library. My best room commands a court in which there are trees and a pump, the water of which is excellent cold, with brandy, and not very insipid without. Here I hope to set up my rest, and not quit till Mr. Powell, the undertaker, gives me notice that I may have possession of my last lodging. He lets lodgings for single gentlemen. I sent you a parcel of books by my last, to give you some idea of the state of European literature. There comes with this two volumes, done up as letters, of minor poetry, a sequel to *Mrs. Leicester*: the best you may suppose mine; the next best are my coadjutor's; you may amuse yourself in guessing them out; but I must tell you mine are but one-third in quantity of the whole. So much for a very delicate subject. It is hard to speak of one's own self, &c. Holcroft had finished his life when I wrote to you, and Hazlitt has since finished his life: I do not mean his own life, but he has finished a life of Holcroft, which is going to press. Tuthill is Dr. Tuthill; I continue Mr. Lamb. I have published a little book for children on titles

of honour; and to give them some idea of the difference of rank and gradual rising I have made a little scale, supposing myself to receive the following various accessions of dignity from the king, who is the fountain of honour. As the first, 1, Mr. C. Lamb; 2, C. Lamb, Esq.; 3, Sir C. Lamb, Bart.; 4, Baron Lamb of Stamford¹; 5, Viscount Lamb; 6, Earl Lamb; 7, Marquis Lamb; 8, Duke Lamb. It would look like quibbling to carry it on further, and especially as it is not necessary for children to go beyond the ordinary titles of sub-regal dignity in our own country; otherwise, I have sometimes in my dreams imagined myself still advancing—as 9th, King Lamb; 10th, Emperor Lamb; 11th, Pope Innocent, nigher than which is nothing. Puns I have not made many (nor punch much) since the date of my last; one I cannot help relating. A constable in Salisbury Cathedral was telling me that eight people dined at the top of the spire of the cathedral, upon which I remarked that they must be very sharp set. But in general, I cultivate the reasoning part of my mind more than the imaginative. I am stuffed out so with eating turkey for dinner and another turkey for supper yesterday (Turkey in Europe and Turkey in Asia), that I can't jog on. It is New Year here. That is, it was New Year half a year back when I was writing this. Nothing puzzles me more than time and space, and yet nothing puzzles me less, for I never think about them. The Persian ambassador is the principal thing talked of now. I sent some people to see him worship the sun on Primrose Hill, at half-past six in the morning, 28th November; but he did not come, which makes me think the old fire-worshippers are a sect almost extinct in Persia. The Persian ambassador's name is Shaw Ali Mirza. The common people call him Shaw nonsense. While I think of it, I have put three letters besides my own three into the India post for you, from your brother, sister, and some gentleman whose name I forget. Will they, have they, did they come safe? The distance you are at cuts up tenses by the root. I think you said you did not know Kate * * * * *. I express her by nine stars, though she is but one. You must have seen her at her father's. Try and remember her. Coleridge is bringing out a paper in weekly numbers, called the *Friend*, which I would send if I could; but the difficulty I had in getting the packets of books out to

¹ "Where my family came from. I have chosen that, if ever I should have my choice."

you before deters me; and you'll want something new to read when you come home. Except Kate, I have had no vision of excellence this year, and she passed by like the queen on her coronation day; you don't know whether you saw her or not. Kate is fifteen; I go about moping, and sing the old pathetic ballad I used to like in my youth—

“‘She's sweet fifteen,
I'm *one year more*.’

Mrs. Bland sang it in boy's clothes the first time I heard it. I sometimes think the lower notes in my voice are like Mrs. Bland's. That glorious singer, Braham, one of my lights, is fled. He was for a season. He was a rare composition of the Jew, the gentleman, and the angel; yet all these elements mixed up so kindly in him that you could not tell which preponderated; but he is gone, and one Phillips is engaged instead. Kate is vanished, but Miss B—— is always to be met with!

“‘Queens drop away, while blue-legged maukin thrives,
And courtly Mildred dies while country Madge survives.’

That is not my poetry, but Quarles'; but haven't you observed that the rarest things are the least obvious? Don't show anybody the names in this letter. I write confidentially, and wish this letter to be considered as *private*. Hazlitt has written a *grammar* for Godwin; Godwin sells it bound up with a treatise of his own on language, but the *grey mare is the better horse*. I don't allude to Mrs. —, but to the word *grammar*, which comes near to *grey mare*, if you observe, in sound. That figure is called *paranomasia* in Greek. I am sometimes happy in it. An old woman begged of me for charity. ‘Ah! sir,’ said she, ‘I have seen better days.’ ‘So have I, good woman,’ I replied; but I meant literally, days not so rainy and overcast as that on which she begged; she meant more prosperous days. Mr. Dawe is made Associate of the Royal Academy. By what law of association I can't guess.”

The humour of this letter—and there are many as good—is not the humour of the *Essays of Elia*. It is not charged with thought like them, nor does it reach the same depths of feeling. But it is the humour of a man of gen-

ius. The inventiveness of it all; the simplicity with which the most daring flights of fancy are hazarded; the amazing improbability of the assertion that it was the "common people" who called the ambassador "Shaw nonsense;" the gravity with which it is set down that it is not necessary *in England* to teach children the degrees of rank beyond royalty—all this is delightful in the extreme, and the power to enjoy it may be taken as a test of the reader's capacity for understanding Lamb's place as a humourist.

The eight years spent in Inner Temple Lane were, in Talfourd's judgment, the happiest of Lamb's life. His income was steadily rising, and he no longer had to bear the pressure of inconvenient poverty. Friends of a higher order than the "friendly harpies" he has told us of, who came about him for his suppers, and the brandy-and-water afterwards, were gradually gathering round him. Hazlitt, and Crabb Robinson, and Procter, and Talfourd were men of tastes and capacities akin to his own. The period was not a fertile one in literary production. The little collection of stories for children, called *Mrs. Leicester's School*, written jointly with his sister, and the volume of *Poetry for Children*, also a joint production, constitute—with one notable exception—the whole of Lamb's literary labours during this time. The exception named is the contribution to Leigh Hunt's periodical, the *Reflector*, of two or three masterly pieces of criticism, which may be more conveniently noticed later in this memoir.

Meantime the cloud of domestic anxiety was still unlifted. Mary Lamb's illnesses were frequent and embarrassing. An extract from a letter to Miss Hutchinson, Mrs. Wordsworth's sister (October, 1815), tells once more the often-told tale, and shows the unaltered patience and seriousness of her brother's faithful guardianship. The pass-

age has a further interest in the picture it incidentally draws of the happier days of the brother and sister: "I am forced to be the replier to your letter, for Mary has been ill, and gone from home these five weeks yesterday. She has left me very lonely and very miserable. I stroll about, but there is no rest but at one's own fireside, and there is no rest for me there now. I look forward to the worse half being past, and keep up as well as I can. She has begun to show some favourable symptoms. The return of her disorder has been frightfully soon this time, with scarce a six months' interval. I am almost afraid my worry of spirits about the East India House was partly the cause of her illness, but one always imputes it to the cause next at hand; more probably it comes from some cause we have no control over or conjecture of. It cuts great slices out of the time, the little time, we shall have to live together. I don't know but the recurrence of these illnesses might help me to sustain her death better than if we had no partial separations. But I won't talk of death. I will imagine us immortal, or forget that we are otherwise. By God's blessing, in a few weeks we may be making our meal together, or sitting in the front row of the Pit at Drury Lane, or taking our evening walk past the theatres, to look at the outside of them, at least, if not to be tempted in. Then we forget that we are assailable; we are strong for the time as rocks;—'the wind is tempered to the shorn Lambs.'"

CHAPTER VI.

RUSSELL STREET, COVENT GARDEN.—THE ESSAYS OF ELIA.

[1817-1823.]

IN the autumn of 1817 Lamb and his sister left the Temple, their home for seventeen years, for lodgings in Great Russell Street, Covent Garden, the corner of Bow Street, and the site where Will's Coffee-house once stood. "Here we are," Lamb writes to Miss Wordsworth in November of this year, "transplanted from our native soil. I thought we never could have been torn up from the Temple. Indeed it was an ugly wrench, but like a tooth, now 'tis out, and I am easy. We never can strike root so deep in any other ground. This, where we are, is a light bit of gardener's mould, and if they take us up from it, it will cost no blood and groans, like mandrakes pulled up. We are in the individual spot I like best in all this great city. The theatres with all their noises; Covent Garden, dearer to me than any gardens of Alcinous, where we are morally sure of the earliest peas and 'sparagus. Bow Street, where the thieves are examined within a few yards of us. Mary had not been here four-and-twenty hours before she saw a thief. She sits at the window working; and casually throwing out her eyes, she sees a concourse of people coming this

way, with a constable to conduct the solemnity. These little incidents agreeably diversify a female life."

During the seventeen years in the Temple Lamb's worldly fortunes had improved. His salary from the India House was increasing every year, and he was beginning to add to his income by authorship. He was already known as critic and essayist to an appreciative few. Friends were gathering round him, and acquaintances who enjoyed his conversation and his weekly suppers (Wednesday evening was open house in the Temple days) were increasing in rather an embarrassing degree. Ever since he had had a house of his own, he had suffered from the intrusion of such troublesome visitors. A too easy good-nature on his part may have been to blame for this. He took often, as he confesses, a perverse pleasure in noticing and befriending those whom others, with good reason, looked shyly on, and as time went on he began to find very little of his leisure time that he could call his own. It may have been with some hope of beginning a freer life on new soil that he resolved to tear himself from his beloved Temple. If so he was not successful. A remarkable letter to Mrs. Wordsworth, a few months only after his removal to Russell Street, tells the same old story of well-meaning intruders. "The reason why I cannot write letters at home is that I am never alone." "Except my morning's walk to the office, which is like treading on sands of gold for that reason, I am never so. I cannot walk home from office, but some officious friend offers his unwelcome courtesies to accompany me. All the morning I am pestered. Evening company I should always like, had I any mornings, but I am saturated with human faces (*divine* forsooth), and voices all the golden morning; and five evenings in a week would be as much as I should covet to be in com-

OF ELIA.

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pany, but I assure you that it is a wonderful week in which I can get two, or one to myself. I am never C. L., but always C. L. & Co. He, who thought it not good for man to be alone, preserve me from the more prodigious monstrosity of being never by myself." "All I mean is that I am a little over-companied, but not that I have any animosity against the good creatures that are so anxious to drive away the harpy solitude from me. I like 'em, and cards, and a cheerful glass; but I mean merely to give you an idea, between office confinement and after-office society, how little time I can call my own." It is not difficult to form an idea from this frank disclosure, of the hindrances and the snares that beset Lamb's comfort and acted harmfully on his temper and habits. It was fortunate for him that at this juncture he should have been led to discover where his powers as a writer indisputably lay, and to find the exact opportunity for their exercise.

In this same year, 1818, a young bookseller, Charles Ollier, whose acquaintance he had recently made, proposed to him to bring out a complete collection of his scattered writings. Some of these, *John Woodvil* and *Rosamund Gray*, had been published separately in former years, and were now out of print. Others were interred among extinct magazines and journals, and these were by far the most worthy of preservation. The edition appeared in the year 1818, in two handsome volumes. It contained, besides *John Woodvil* and *Rosamund Gray*, and a fair quantity of verse (including the *Farewell to Tobacco*), the *Recollections of Christ's Hospital*, the essay on *The Tragedies of Shakespeare, considered with reference to their fitness for stage representation*, and that on *The Genius and Character of Hogarth*, these two last having originally appeared in Leigh Hunt's magazine, the *Reflector*. The edition was

prefaced by a dedicatory letter to Coleridge. "You will smile," wrote Lamb, "to see the slender labours of your friend designated by the title of *Works*; but such was the wish of the gentlemen who had kindly undertaken the trouble of collecting them, and from their judgment there could be no appeal." He goes on pleasantly to recall to his old school-fellow how, in company with their friend Lloyd, they had so many years before tried their poetical fortune. "You will find your old associate," he adds, "in his second volume, dwindled into prose and *criticism*." Lamb must have felt, as he wrote the word, that "dwindled" was hardly the fitting term. He had written nothing as yet so noble in matter and in style, nothing so worthy to live, as the analysis of the characters of Hamlet and Lear in the essay on *Shakspeare's Tragedies*. Lamb's high rank, as essayist and critic, must have been put beyond dispute by the publication under his own name of his collected *Works*. He was already well known and appreciated by some of the finest minds of his day. He now addressed a wider public, and the edition of 1818 gave him a status he had not before enjoyed. And yet at this date, various as were the contents of the two volumes, he had not found the opportunity that was to call forth his special faculty.

The opportunity was, however, at hand. In January, 1820, Baldwin, Cradock, and Joy, the publishers, brought out the first number of a new monthly journal, reviving in it the name of an earlier, and extinct periodical, the *London Magazine*. The editor they chose was John Scott, a competent critic and journalist who had formerly edited the *Champion* newspaper. The aim of this new venture, as set forth in the opening prospectus, was to be of a higher and more intellectual class than its many popular contem-

poraries. It was to be a journal of criticism and the *Belles Lettres*, including original poetry, and yet to contain in a monthly appendix such statistics of trade and general home and foreign intelligence as would make it useful to those of a less literary turn. The magazine had an existence of five years, undergoing many changes of fortune, and passing in that time through many hands. Its first editor, Mr. Scott, was killed in a duel in the summer of 1821, and its first publishers parted with it to Taylor and Hessey. At no period of its career does it seem to have been a marked commercial success. Either capital was wanted, or management was unsatisfactory, for the list of contributors during these five years was remarkable. Mr. Procter and Hood have discoursed pleasantly on their various fellow-contributors to the magazine, and the social gatherings held once a month by Taylor and Hessey (who employed no editor) at the office in Waterloo Place. Hazlitt, Allan Cunningham, Cary (the translator of Dante), John Hamilton Reynolds, George Darley, Keats, James Montgomery, Sir John Bowring, Hartley Coleridge, were regular or occasional contributors. Carlyle published his *Life and Writings of Schiller* in the later volumes, and De Quincey (besides other papers) his *Opium-eater*.

Talfourd thinks that Lamb owed to his intimacy with Hazlitt his introduction to the managers of the *London*. He was not on the staff from the beginning. The first number was issued in January, 1820, and Lamb's first contribution was in the August following. In the number for that month appeared an article, with the not very attractive title, *Recollections of the South Sea House*. As to its authorship there was no indication except the signature at the end—"Elia." Lamb has himself told us the origin of this immortal *nom de plume*. When he had

written his first essay, wishing to remain anonymous, and yet wanting a convenient mark for identification in articles to come, he bethought him of an Italian of the name of Elia, who had been fellow-clerk with him thirty years before, during the few months that he had been employed as a boy in the South Sea House. As a practical joke (Lamb confesses) he borrowed his old friend's name, hoping to make his excuses when they should next meet. "I went the other day," writes Lamb in June, 1821, "(not having seen him for a year) to laugh over with him at my usurpation of his name, and found him, alas! no more than a name, for he died of consumption eleven months ago, and I knew not of it. So the name has fairly devolved to me, I think, and 'tis all he has left me." Lamb continued to use it for his contributions to the *London* and other periodicals for many years. It is doubtful if the name has ever been generally pronounced as Lamb intended. "Call him Ellia," he wrote to his publisher, Mr. Taylor, but the world has taken more kindly to the broad e and the single l.

When the first series of the *Essays of Elia* appeared in a collected form in 1823, it consisted of some five-and-twenty essays, contributed at the rate of one a month (occasionally two) with scarcely an intermission between August, 1820, and December, 1822. It would seem as if no conditions had been imposed upon Lamb by the editor as to the subject-matter of his essays. He was allowed to roam at his own free-will over the experiences of his life, and to reproduce them in any form, and with any discursiveness into which he might be allured on the way. The matter of the essays proved to be largely personal, or at least to savour of the autobiographical. The first essay already referred to professed to be a recollection of the

South Sea House as it existed thirty years before, with sketches of several of the clerks who had been Lamb's contemporaries. As, however, he was a boy of fifteen at the time he entered, and moreover was at most two years in the office, it is probable that he owed much of the knowledge exhibited in the paper to his elder brother John, who remained in the office long after Charles had left it. Lamb was in the habit of spending his short summer holiday in one or other of the two great university towns, and his second essay was an account of *Oxford in the Vacation*. The third in order of appearance was an account of Christ's Hospital, on that side of it which had *not* been touched in his earlier paper on the same subject. The fourth was a discursive meditation on the *Two Races of Men*, by which Lamb meant those who borrow and those who lend, which he illustrated by the example of one Ralph Bigod (whom he had known in his journalist days on the *Albion*), and Coleridge, who so freely borrowed from Lamb's library, and so bountifully returned the loan with interest in the shape of marginal annotations. In the essay, *Mrs. Battle's Opinions on Whist*, he describes an old lady, a relative of the Plumer family, whom he had known in person, or by repute, at the old mansion in Hertfordshire. In the chapter *On Ears*, his own want of musical ear, and the kind of impressions from musical sounds to which he was susceptible, is the subject of his confidences. In *My Relations*, and *Mackery End in Hertfordshire* he draws portraits, under the disguise of two cousins, James and Bridget Elia, of his brother John and his sister Mary. *The Old Benchers of the Inner Temple* comprises all that he remembered of his boyhood spent in the Temple, with particulars of the more notable Masters of the Bench of that day, obtained no doubt from his father, the Lovel of

the essay, and his father's old and loyal friend Randal Norris, the sub-treasurer of the Inner Temple. Other essays, such as that *On Chimney Sweepers*, and *The Decay of Beggars in the Metropolis*, contain the results of that observing eye with which he had daily surveyed the streets of his beloved city for so many years, "looking no one in the face for more than a moment," as Mr. Procter has told us, yet "contriving to see everything as he went on."

The opening essay on the *South Sea House* shows that there was no need to feel his way, either in matter or style. He began in the fulness of his observation, and with a style already formed, and adapting itself to all changes of thought and feeling. His description of John Tipp, the accountant, was enough to show that not only a keen observer, but a master of English was at work :

"At the desk, Tipp was quite another sort of creature. Thence all ideas that were purely ornamental were banished. You could not speak of anything romantic without rebuke. Politics were excluded. A newspaper was thought too refined and abstracted. The whole duty of man consisted in writing off dividend warrants. The striking of the annual balance in the company's books (which perhaps differed from the balance of last year in the sum of 25*l.* 1*s.* 6*d.*) occupied his days and nights for a month previous. Not that Tipp was blind to the deadness of *things* (as they call them in the City) in his beloved house, or did not sigh for a return of the old stirring days when South Sea hopes were young (he was indeed equal to the wielding of any the most intricate accounts of the most flourishing company in these or those days): but to a genuine accountant the difference of proceeds is as nothing. The fractional farthing is as dear to his heart as the thousands which stand before it. He is the true actor who, whether his part be a prince or a peasant, must act it with like intensity. With Tipp, form was everything. His life was formal. His actions seemed ruled with a ruler. His pen was not less erring than his heart. He made the best executor in the world; he was plagued with incessant executorships accordingly, which ex-

cited his spleen and soothed his vanity in equal ratios. He would swear (for Tipp swore) at the little orphans, whose rights he would guard with a tenacity like the grasp of the dying hand that commended their interests to his protection. With all this there was about him a sort of timidity—his few enemies used to give it a worse name—a something which, in reverence to the dead, we will place, if you please, a little on this side of the heroic. Nature certainly had been pleased to endow John Tipp with a sufficient measure of the principle of self-preservation. There is a cowardice which we do not despise, because it has nothing base or treacherous in its elements; it betrays itself, not you; it is mere temperament; the absence of the romantic and the enterprising; it sees a lion in the way, and will not, with Fortinbras, 'greatly find quarrel in a straw,' when some supposed honour is at stake. Tipp never mounted the box of a stage coach in his life, or leaned against the rails of a balcony, or walked upon the ridge of a parapet, or looked down a precipice, or let off a gun, or went upon a water-party, or would willingly let you go if he could have helped it; neither was it recorded of him that for lucre, or for intimidation, he ever forsook friend or principle."

Two of the essays have attained a celebrity, certainly not out of proportion to their merits, but serving to make quotation from them almost an impertinence. These are the *Dissertation on Roast Pig*, Lamb's version of a story told him by his friend Manning (though *not* probably to be found in any Chinese manuscript), and the essay, finally called *Imperfect Sympathies*, but originally bearing the cumbrous title of *Jews, Quakers, Scotchmen, and other Imperfect Sympathies*. It is here that occurs the famous analysis of the Scotch character, perhaps the cleverest passage, in its union of fine observation and felicity of phrase, in the whole of Lamb's writings. The anecdote of Lamb's favourite picture—his "beauty"—the Leonardo da Vinci, and that of the party where the son of Burns was expected, together with the complaint that follows of the hopelessness of satisfying a Scotchman in the matter of the

appreciation of that poet, have become as much common-places of quotation as Sydney Smith's famous reference to the surgical operation. The brilliancy of the whole passage has rather thrown into the shade the disquisition on Quaker manners that follows, and the story he had heard from Carlisle, the surgeon, of the three Quakers who "stopped to bait" at Andover. But the whole paper is excellent.

Hardly less familiar is the account of old Mrs. Battle, and her opinions upon the game of whist. "'A clear fire, a clean hearth, and the rigour of the game.' This was the celebrated wish of old Sarah Battle (now with God) who next to her devotions loved a good game at whist. She was none of your lukewarm gamesters, your half-and-half players, who have no objection to take a hand if you want one to make up a rubber; who affirm that they have no pleasure in winning, that they like to win one game and lose another, that they can while away an hour very agreeably at a card-table, but are indifferent whether they play or no, and will desire an adversary who has slipped a wrong card to take it up and play another. These insufferable triflers are the curse of a table; one of these flies will spoil a whole pot. Of such it may be said that they do not play at cards, but only play at playing with them."

The portrait must have been drawn in the main from life. One of the most singular suggestions ever offered by Lamb's editors is that this "gentlewoman born," with her "fine last-century countenance," the niece of "old Walter Plumer," was drawn from Lamb's old grandmother, Mrs. Field. As a test of the likelihood of this theory it will be found instructive to read, after this essay, the touching lines already cited called *The Grandame*.

The marked peculiarities of Lamb's style give so unique

a colouring to all these essays that one is apt to overlook to what a variety of themes it is found suitable. There is no mood, from that of almost reckless merriment to that of pathetic sweetness or religious awe, to which the style is not able to modulate with no felt sense of incongruity. A feature of Lamb's method, as we have seen, is his use of quotations. Not only are they brought in so as really to illustrate, but the passages cited themselves receive illustration from the use made of them, and gain a permanent and heightened value from it. Whether it be a garden-scene from Marvell, a solemn paradox from Sir Thomas Browne, or a stanza from some then recent poem of Wordsworth, the quotation fulfils a double purpose, and has sent many a reader to explore for himself in the author whose words strike him with such luminous effect in their new setting. Take, for example, the Miltonic digression in the essay on *Grace before Meat*. Lamb is never more happy than in quoting from or discoursing on Milton :

"The severest satire upon full tables and surfeits is the banquet which Satan, in the *Paradise Regained*, provides for a temptation in the wilderness :

" 'A table richly spread in regal modes
With dishes piled and meats of noblest sort
And savour ; beasts of chase, or fowl of game,
In pastry built, or from the spit, or boiled
Gris-amber-steamed ; all fish from sea or shore,
Freshet or purling brook, for which was drained
Pontus, and Lucrine bay, and Afric coast.'

The tempter, I warrant you, thought these cates would go down without the recommendatory preface of a benediction. They are like to be short graces where the devil plays the host. I am afraid the poet wants his usual decorum in this place. Was he thinking of the old Roman luxury, or of a gaudy day at Cambridge ? This was

a temptation fitter for a Heliogabalus. The whole banquet is too civic and culinary; and the accompaniments altogether a profanation of that deep, abstracted, holy scene. The mighty artillery of sauces which the cook-fiend conjures up, is out of proportion to the simple wants and plain hunger of the guest. He that disturbed him in his dreams, from his dreams might have been taught better. To the temperate fantasies of the famished Son of God what sort of feasts presented themselves? He dreamed indeed—

“‘As appetite is wont to dream

Of meats and drinks, nature's refreshment sweet.’

But what meats?

“‘Him thought, he by the brook of Cherith stood,
And saw the ravens with their horny beaks
Food to Elijah bringing even and morn:
Though ravenous, taught to abstain from what they brought.
He saw the prophet also how he fled
Into the desert, and how there he slept
Under a juniper: then how awaked
He found his supper on the coals prepared,
And by the angel was bid rise and eat,
And ate the second time after repose,
The strength whereof sufficed him forty days:
Sometimes, that with Elijah he partook
Or as a guest with Daniel at his pulse.’

Nothing in Milton is finelier fancied than these temperate dreams of the divine Hungerer. To which of these two visionary banquets, think you, would the introduction of what is called the grace have been most fitting and pertinent?”

“I am no Quaker at my food.” So Lamb characteristically proceeds, after one short paragraph interposed. “I confess I am not indifferent to the kinds of it. Those unctuous morsels of deer's flesh were not made to be received with dispassionate services. I hate a man who swallows it, affecting not to know what he is eating; I suspect his taste in higher matters. I shrink instinctively

from one who professes to like minced veal. There is a physiognomical character in the tastes for food. C—— holds that a man cannot have a pure mind who refuses apple-dumplings. I am not certain but he is right."

And so he rambles on in almost endless digression and absolute fearlessness as to egotism of such a kind ever palling or annoying. This egotism—it is almost superfluous to mark—is a dominant characteristic of Lamb's manner. The prominence of the personal element had indeed been a feature of the essay proper ever since Montaigne, its first inventor. But Lamb's use of the "I" has little resemblance to the gossiping confessions of the Gascon gentleman. These grave avowals as to the minced veal and the dumplings are not of the same order as Montaigne's confidences as to his preference of white wine to red. The "I" of Lamb in such a case is no concession to an idle curiosity, nor is it in fact biographical at all. Nor is it the egotism of Steele and Addison, though, when occasion arises, Lamb shows signs of the influence upon him of these earlier masters in his own special school. He thus begins, for instance, his paper called *The Wedding*: "I do not know when I have been better pleased than at being invited last week to be present at the wedding of a friend's daughter. I like to make one at these ceremonies, which to us old people give back our youth in a manner, and restore our gayest season, in the remembrance of our own success, or the regrets scarcely less tender, of our own youthful disappointments, in this point of a settlement. On these occasions I am sure to be in good-humour for a week or two after, and enjoy a reflected honeymoon." In matter, language, and cadence this might have been taken bodily from the *Spectator*. Yet this was no freak of imitation on Lamb's part. It merely arose from the subject

and the train of thought engendered by it being of that domestic kind which Richard Steele loved so well to discourse on. Lamb's mind and memory were so stored with English reading of an older date, that the occurrence of a particular theme sends him back, quite naturally, to those early masters who had specially made that theme their own. For all his strongly-marked individuality of manner, there are perhaps few English writers who have written so differently upon different themes. When he chose to be fanciful, he could be as euphuistic as Donne or Burton—when he was led to be grave and didactic, he could write with the sententiousness of Bacon—when his imagination and feeling together lifted him above thoughts of style, his English cleared and soared into regions not far below the noblest flights of Milton and Jeremy Taylor. When on the other hand he was at home, on homely themes, he wrote “like a man of this world,” and of his own century and year.

Still it must be said that his style is in the main an eclectic English. It is needless to add that this implies no affectation. No man ever wrote to such purpose in a style deliberately assumed. Hazlitt remarks of him, that “he is so thoroughly imbued with the spirit of his authors, that the idea of imitation is almost done away. There is an inward unction, a marrowy vein both in the thought and feeling, an intuition, deep and lively, of his subject that carries off any quaintness or awkwardness arising from an antiquated style and dress.” This is quite true, and Hazlitt might have added that in the rare instances when Lamb used this old-fashioned manner, without the deeper thought or finer observation to elevate it, the manner alone, whimsical and ingenious as it is, becomes a trifle wearisome. The euphuistic ingenuity of

All Fools' Day is not a pleasing sample of Lamb's faculty.

His friend Bernard Barton wrote of him in a sonnet:

"From the olden time
Of authorship, thy patent should be dated,
And thou with Marvell, Browne, and Burton mated."

This trio of authors is well chosen. There is no poet he loves better to quote than Marvell, and none with whose poetic vein his own is more in sympathy. Lamb received his impressions from nature (unless it was in Hertfordshire) largely through the medium of books, and he makes it clear that old-fashioned garden-scenes come to him first with their peculiar charm when he meets with them in Milton or Marvell. But the second name cited by Barton is the most important of all among the influences on Lamb's style and the cast of his thought. Of all old writers, the author of the *Urn Burial* and the *Religio Medici* appears oftenest, in quotation or allusion, in the *Essays of Elia*. Lamb somewhere boasts that he first "among the moderns" discovered and proclaimed his excellences. And though Lamb never (so far as I can discover) caught the special rhythm of Browne's sentences, it is from him that he adopted the constant habit, just referred to, of asserting his opinions, feelings, and speculations in the first person. Different as are the two men in other regards, Lamb's egotism is largely the egotism of Sir Thomas Browne. From Browne too he probably caught a certain habit of gloomy paradox, in dwelling on the mysteries of the supernatural world. His sombre musings upon death in the essay called *New Year's Eve* bear the strong impress of Browne, notwithstanding that they are antagonistic (perhaps consciously) to a remark-

able passage in the *Religio Medici*. And even in his lighter vein of speculation, Lamb's persistent use of the first person often reads as if he were humorously parodying the same original.

A large portion of Lamb's history is related in these essays, and with the addition of a few names and dates, a complete biography might be constructed from them alone. As we have seen, he tells of his childish thoughts and feelings, of his school-days, his home in the Temple, the Hertfordshire village where he passed his holidays as a boy, and the university towns where he loved to spend them in manhood. He has drawn most detailed portraits of his grandmother, his father, sister, and brother, and would no doubt have added that of his mother, but for the painful memories it would have brought to Mary. Of the incidents in the happier days of his life, when Mary was in good health, and the daily sharer in all interests and pleasures, he has written with a special charm. There is a passage in the essay called *Old China* without which any picture of their united life would be incomplete. The essay had begun by declaring Lamb's partiality for old china, from which after a few paragraphs he diverges, by a modulation common with him, to the recollection of his past struggles. He had been taking tea, he says, with his cousin (under this relationship his sister Mary is always indicated), using a new set of china, and remarking to her on their better fortunes which enabled them to indulge now and again in the luxury of such a purchase, "when a passing sentiment seemed to overshadow the brows of my companion. I am quick at detecting these summer clouds in Bridget.

"'I wish the good old times would come again,' she said, 'when we were not quite so rich. I do not mean

that I want to be poor, but there was a middle state,' so she was pleased to ramble on, 'in which I am sure we were a great deal happier. A purchase is but a purchase, now that you have money enough and to spare. Formerly it used to be a triumph. When we coveted a cheap luxury (and O! how much ado I had to get you to consent in those days!) we were used to have a debate two or three days before, and to weigh the *for* and *against*, and think what we might spare it out of, and what saving we could hit upon that should be an equivalent. A thing was worth buying then, when we felt the money that we paid for it.

"Do you remember the brown suit which you made to hang upon you, till all your friends cried shame upon you, it grew so threadbare, and all because of that folio Beaumont and Fletcher, which you dragged home late at night from Barker's in Covent Garden? Do you remember how we eyed it for weeks before we could make up our minds to the purchase, and had not come to a determination till it was near ten o'clock of the Saturday night, when you set off from Islington fearing you should be too late—and when the old bookseller, with some grumbling opened his shop, and by the twinkling taper (for he was setting bedwards), lighted out the relic from his dusty treasures, and when you lugged it home, wishing it were twice as cumbersome, and when you presented it to me, and when we were exploring the perfectness of it (*collating*, you called it), and while I was repairing some of the loose leaves with paste, which your impatience would not suffer to be left till daybreak—was there no pleasure in being a poor man? or can those neat black clothes which you wear now, and are so careful to keep brushed, since we have become rich and finical, give you half the honest vanity

with which you flaunted it about in that over-worn suit—your old corbeau—for four or five weeks longer than you should have done, to pacify your conscience for the mighty sum of fifteen or sixteen shillings, was it?—a great affair we thought it then—which you had lavished on the old folio? Now you can afford to buy any book that pleases you, but I do not see that you ever bring me home any nice old purchases now.”

The essay “Blakesmoor in H——shire” has been more than once referred to, in connexion with Lamb’s old grandmother, Mrs. Field. The essay acquires a new interest when it is known how much of fact is contained in it. William Plumer, who represented his county in parliament for so many years, and was at the time of his death, in 1822, member for Higham Ferrers, left his estates at Gilston and Blakesware to his widow, apparently with the understanding that the old Blakesware mansion should be pulled down. Accordingly not long before the date of Lamb’s essay (September, 1824) it had been levelled to the ground; and some of the more valuable of its contents, including the busts of the Twelve Cæsars, so often dwelt on by Lamb in letter or essay, removed to the other house at Gilston. Under its roof, and among its gardens and terraces, Lamb’s happiest days as a child had been spent, and he had just been to look once more on the few vestiges still remaining:

“I do not know a pleasure more affecting than to range at will over the deserted apartments of some fine old family mansion. The traces of extinct grandeur admit of a better passion than envy; and contemplations on the great and good, whom we fancy in succession to have been its inhabitants, weave for us illusions incompatible with the bustle of modern occupancy, and vanities of foolish present aristocracy. The same difference of feeling, I think, attests us between

entering an empty and a crowded church. In the latter it is chance but some present human frailty—an act of inattention on the part of some of the auditory, or a trait of affectation, or worse, vainglory, on that of the preacher—puts us by our best thoughts, disharmonizing the place and the occasion. But would'st thou know the beauty of holiness? Go alone on some week-day, borrowing the keys of good Master Sexton, traverse the cool aisles of some country church; think of the piety that has kneeled there—the congregations, old and young, that have found consolation there—the meek pastor, the docile parishioner. With no disturbing emotions, no cross, conflicting comparisons, drink in the tranquillity of the place, till thou thyself become as fixed and motionless as the marble effigies that kneel and weep around thee.

“Journeying northward lately, I could not resist going some few miles out of my road to look upon the remains of an old great house with which I had been impressed in this way in infancy. I was apprised that the owner of it had lately pulled it down; still I had a vague notion that it could not all have perished, that so much solidity with magnificence could not have been crushed all at once into the mere dust and rubbish which I found it.

“The work of ruin had proceeded with a swift hand indeed, and the demolition of a few weeks had reduced it to an antiquity.

“I was astonished at the indistinction of everything. Where had stood the great gates? What bounded the court-yard? Whereabout did the out-houses commence? A few bricks only lay as representatives of that which was so stately and so spacious.

“Death does not shrink up his human victim at this rate. The burnt ashes of a man weigh more in their proportion.

“Had I seen these brick and mortar knaves at their process of destruction, at the plucking of every panel I should have felt the varlets at my heart. I should have cried out to them to spare a plank at least out of the cheerful store-room, in whose hot window-seat I used to sit and read Cowley, with the grass-plot before, and the hum and flappings of that one solitary wasp that ever haunted it about me—it is in mine ears now, as oft as summer returns; or a panel of the yellow room.

“Why, every plank and panel of that house for me had magic in it. The tapestried bedrooms—tapestry so much better than painting—not adorning merely—but peopling the wainscots—at which

childhood ever and anon would steal a look, shifting its coverlid (replaced as quickly) to exercise its tender courage in a momentary eye-encounter with those stern bright visages, staring reciprocally—all Ovid on the walls—in colours vividder than his descriptions. Actæon in mid sprout, with the unappeasable prudery of Diana; and the still more provoking and almost culinary coolness of Dan Phœbus, eel-fashion, deliberately divesting of Marsyas.

"Then that haunted room—in which old Mrs. Battle died—whereinto I have crept, but always in the daytime, with a passion of fear; and a sneaking curiosity, terror-tainted, to hold communication with the past.—*How shall they build it up again?*

"It was an old deserted place, yet not so long deserted but that traces of the splendour of past inmates were everywhere apparent. Its furniture was still standing, oven to the tarnished gilt-leather battledores and crumbling feathers of shuttlecocks in the nursery, which told that children had once played there. But I was a lonely child, and had the range at will of every apartment, knew every nook and corner, wondered and worshipped everywhere. The solitude of childhood is not so much the mother of thought, as it is the feeder of love, and silence, and admiration. So strange a passion for the place possessed me in those years, that though there lay—I shame to say how few roods distant from the mansion—half hid by trees, what I judged some romantic lake, such was the spell which bound me to the house, and such my carefulness not to pass its strict and proper precincts, that the idle waters lay unexplored for me; and not till late in life, curiosity prevailing over elder devotion, I found, to my astonishment, a pretty brawling brook had been the *Lacus Incognitus* of my infancy. Variegated views, extensive prospects—and those at no great distance from the house—I was told of such—what were they to me, being out of the boundaries of my Eden? So far from a wish to roam, I would have drawn, methought, still closer the fences of my chosen prison; and have been hemmed in by a yet securer cincture of those excluding garden walls. I could have exclaimed with that garden-loving poet—

"Bind me, ye woodbines, in your twines;
Curl me about, ye gadding vines;
And oh so close your circles lace,
That I may never leave this place:

But lest your fetters prove too weak,
Ere I your silken bondage break,
Do you, O braubles, chain me too,
And, courteous briars, nail me through.¹

I was here as in a lonely temple. Snug firesides, the low-built roof, parlours ten feet by ten, frugal boards, and all the homeliness of home—these were the condition of my birth—the wholesome soil which I was planted in.

"Yet, without impeachment to their tenderest lessons, I am not sorry to have had glances of something beyond; and to have taken, if but a peep, in childhood, at the contrasting accidents of a great fortune."

In this essay, save for the change of Blakesware to Blakesmoor, the experience is related without disguise. But it is not always easy to disengage fact from fiction in these more personal confessions. Lamb had a love of mystifying and putting his readers on a false scent. And the difficulty of getting at the truth is the greater because he is often most outspoken when we should expect him to be reticent, and on the other hand alters names and places when there would seem to be little reason for it. A curious instance of this habit is supplied by the touching reverie called *Dream Children*. This essay appeared in the *London* for January, 1822. Lamb's elder brother John was then lately dead. A letter to Wordsworth, of March in this year, mentions his death as recent, and speaks of a certain "deadness to everything," which the writer dated from that event. The "broad, burly, jovial" John Lamb (so Talfourd describes him) had lived his own, easy, prosperous life up to this time, not altogether avoiding social relations with his brother and sister, but evidently absorbed to the last in his own interests and pleasures. The death of this brother, wholly unsympathetic as he was with

¹ Marvell on Appleton House, to the Lord Fairfax.

Charles, served to bring home to him his loneliness. He was left in the world with but one near relation, and that one too often removed from him for months at a time by the saddest of afflictions. No wonder if he became keenly aware of his solitude. No wonder if his thoughts turned to what *might* have been, and he looked back to those boyish days when he wandered in the glades of Blakesware with Alice by his side. He imagines himself with his little ones, who have crept round him to hear stories about their "great-grandmother Field." For no reason that is apparent, while he retains his grandmother's real name, he places the house in Norfolk, but all the details that follow are drawn from Blakesware. "Then I went on to say how religious and how good their great-grandmother Field was, how beloved and respected by everybody, though she was not indeed the mistress of this great house, but had only the charge of it (and yet in some respects she might be said to be the mistress of it too) committed to her by its owner, who preferred living in a newer and more fashionable mansion which he had purchased somewhere in an adjoining county;¹ but still she lived in it in a manner as if it had been her own, and kept up the dignity of the great house in a sort while she lived, which afterwards came to decay, and was nearly pulled down, and all its old ornaments stripped and carried away to the owner's other house, where they were set up, and looked as awkward as if some one were to carry away the old tombs they had seen lately at the abbey and stick them up in Lady C.'s tawdry gilt drawing-room. Here John smiled, as much as to say, 'That would be foolish indeed.'"

Inexpressibly touching, when we have once learned to penetrate the thin disguise in which he clothes them, are

¹ This is, of course, Gilston, the other seat of the Plumer family.

the boarded memories, the tender regrets, which Lamb, writing by his "lonely hearth," thus ventured to commit to the uncertain sympathies of the great public. More touching still is the almost superhuman sweetness with which he deals with the character of his lately lost brother. He had named his little ones after this brother, and after their "pretty dead mother"—John and Alice. And there is something of the magic of genius, unless, indeed, it was a burst of uncontrollable anguish, in the revelation with which his dream ends. He kept still, as always, the secret of his beloved's name. But he tells us who it was that won the prize from him, and it is no secret that in this case the real name is given. The conclusion of this essay must be our last extract, but it would be difficult to find one more worthy :

"Then in somewhat a more heightened tone, I told how, though their great-grandmother Field loved all her grandchildren, yet in an especial manner she might be said to love their uncle, John L—, because he was so handsome and spirited a youth, and a king to the rest of us; and instead of moping about in solitary corners, like some of us, he would mount the most mettlesome horse he could get, when but an imp no bigger than themselves, and make it carry him half over the county in a morning, and join the hunters when there were any out; and yet he loved the old house and gardens too, but had too much spirit to be always pent up within their boundaries; and how their uncle grew up to man's estate as brave as he was handsome, to the admiration of everybody, but of their great-grandmother Field most especially; and how he used to carry me upon his back when I was a lame-footed boy—for he was a good bit older than me—many a mile when I could not walk for pain; and how in after-life he became lame-footed too, and I did not always (I fear) make allowance enough for him when he was impatient and in pain, nor remember sufficiently how considerate he had been to me when I was lame-footed; and how when he died, though he had not been dead an hour, it seemed as if he had died a great while ago, such a distance there is betwixt life and death; and how I bore his death as I

thought pretty well at first, but afterwards it haunted and haunted me; and though I did not cry or take it to heart as some do, and as I think he would have done if I had died, yet I missed him all day long, and knew not till then how much I had loved him. I missed his kindness and I missed his crossness, and wished him to be alive again to be quarrelling with him (for we quarrelled sometimes), rather than not have him again, and was as uneasy without him as he their poor uncle must have been when the doctor took off his limb. Here the children fell a-crying, and asked if their little mourning which they had on was not for Uncle John, and they looked up and prayed me not to go on about their uncle, but to tell them some stories about their pretty dead mother. Then I told how for seven long years, in hope sometimes, sometimes in despair, yet persisting ever, I courted the fair Alice W——n; and as much as children could understand, I explained to them what coyness and difficulty and denial meant in maidens—when suddenly, turning to Alice, the soul of the first Alice looked out at her eyes with such a reality of representment, that I became in doubt which of them stood there before me, or whose that bright hair was; and while I stood gazing, both the children gradually grew fainter to my view, receding, and still receding till nothing at last but two mournful features were seen in the uttermost distance, which, without speech, strangely impressed upon me the effects of speech: 'We are not of Alice, nor of thee, nor are we children at all. The children of Alice call Bartram father. We are nothing; less than nothing, and dreams. We are only what might have been, and must wait upon the tedious shores of Lethe millions of ages before we have existence and a name'—and immediately awaking I found myself quietly seated in my bachelor arm-chair, where I had fallen asleep, with the faithful Bridget unchanged by my side; but John L. (or James Elia) was gone for ever."

The space available for quotation is exhausted, and many sides of Lamb's peculiar faculty are still unrepresented. Those who have yet to make his acquaintance may be advised to read, in addition to those already named, the essay *On Some of the Old Actors*, containing the analysis of the character of Malvolio, a noble example of the

uses which Shakspearian criticism may be made to serve—the extract from a letter to his friend Barron Field, a judge in New South Wales, entitled *Distant Correspondents*, and that called *The Praise of Chimney Sweepers*. Belonging to the *personal* group, which includes *Blakesmoor* and *Dream Children*, is the paper *Mackery End in Hertfordshire*, scarcely less delightful. The two critical essays on Sidney and Wither (the latter, however, does not belong to the *Elia* series), contain some of Lamb's most subtle criticism and most eloquent writing. *Barbara S.* is an anecdote of Fanny Kelly's early life; and *Captain Jackson* is a character-sketch, which, despite the vast difference between the two writers, curiously suggests the fine hand of Miss Austen. Lastly, the paper with the startling title, *Confessions of a Drunkard*, is not to be overlooked. A strange interest attaches to this paper. It had been originally written by Lamb, at the request of a friend, as one of a series of Temperance Tracts. In this capacity it had been quoted in an article in the *Quarterly*, for April, 1822, as "a fearful picture of the consequences of intemperance," which the reviewer went on to say "we have reason to know is a true tale." In order to give the author the opportunity of contradicting this statement, the tract was reprinted in the *London* in the following August, under the signature of *Elia*. To it were appended a few words of remonstrance with the *Quarterly* reviewer for assuming the literal truthfulness of these confessions, but accompanied with certain significant admissions that showed Lamb had no right to be seriously indignant. "It is indeed," he writes, "a compound extracted out of his long observations of the effects of drinking upon all the world about him; and this accumulated mass of misery he hath centred (as the custom is with ju-

dicious essayists) in a single figure. We deny not that a portion of his own experiences may have passed into the picture (as who, that is not a washy fellow, but must at some time have felt the after-operation of a too generous cup?); but then how heightened! how exaggerated! how little within the sense of the Review, where a part, in their slanderous usage, must be understood to stand for the whole." The truth is that Lamb in writing his tract had been playing with edge-tools, and could hardly have complained if they turned against himself. It would be those who knew Lamb, or at least the circumstances of his life, best, who would be most likely to accept these confessions as true. For in the course of them he gives with curious fidelity the outline of an experience that was certainly not imaginary. The "friendly harpies" who came about him for his gin-and-water, and made its consumption more and more a habit; the exchange of these in due course for companions of a better type, "of intrinsic and felt worth;" the substitution for a while, under the influence of two of these, of the "sweet enemy" tobacco, and the new slavery to this counter-attraction; the increasing need of stimulant to set his wits to work, and the buffoonery indulged under its effects; all this is told in a way that no friend of Lamb could affect to mistake. No doubt the exaggeration which Lamb pleads is there also, and the drunkard's utter collapse and misery are described in a style which, as applied to himself, was absurd. But to call the insinuation that the tract had in it biographic truth, "malignant," as some of Lamb's apologists have done, is not less absurd. The essay had enough reality in it to live as a very powerful plea for the virtue of self-restraint, and it may continue to do good service in the cause.

De Quincey has observed that one chief pleasure we

derive from Lamb's writing is due to a secret satisfaction in feeling that his admirers must always of necessity be a select few. There is an unpleasantly cynical flavour about the remark, but at the same time one understands to what it points. Thoroughly to understand and enjoy Charles Lamb, one must have come to entertain a feeling towards him almost like personal affection, and such a circle of intimates will always be small. It is necessary to come to the study of his writings in entire trustfulness, and having first cast away all prejudice. The reader must be content to enjoy what is set before him, and not to grumble because any chance incident on the road tempts the writer away from the path on which he set out. If an essay is headed *Oxford in the Vacation*, he must not complain that only half the paper touches on Oxford, and that the rest is divided between the writer Elia and a certain absent-minded old scholar, George Dyer, on whose peculiarities Lamb was never weary of dwelling. What, then, is the compensating charm? What is there in these rambling and multifarious meditations that proves so stimulating and suggestive? There is an epithet commonly applied to Lamb so hackneyed that one shrinks from using it once more—the epithet “delightful.” No other word certainly seems more appropriate, and it is perhaps because (in defiance of etymology) the sound of it suggests that double virtue of illuminating, and making happy. It is in vain to attempt to convey an idea of the impression left by Lamb's style. It evades analysis. One might as well seek to account for the perfume of lavender, or the flavour of quince. It is in truth an essence, prepared from flowers and herbs gathered in fields where the ordinary reader does not often range. And the nature of the writer—the alembic in which these various simples were distilled—was as rare

for sweetness and purity as the best of those enshrined in the old folios—his “midnight darlings.” If he had by nature the delicate grace of Marvell, and the quaint fancy of Quarles, he also shared the chivalry of Sidney, and could lay on himself “the lowliest duties,” in the spirit of his best-beloved of all, John Milton. It is the man, Charles Lamb, that constitutes the enduring charm of his written words. He is, as I have said, an egotist—but an egotist without a touch of vanity or self-assertion—an egotist without a grain of envy or ill-nature. When asked one day whether he did not hate some person under discussion, he retorted, “How could I hate him? Don’t I know him? I never could hate any one I knew.” It is this humanity that gives to his intellect its flexibility and its deep vision, that is the feeder at once of his pathos and his humour.

CHAPTER VII.

COLEBROOK ROW, ISLINGTON.—THE CONTROVERSY WITH
SOUTHEY, AND RETIREMENT FROM THE INDIA HOUSE.

[1823-1826.]

THE last six years of Lamb's life, though the most remarkable in his literary annals, had not been fruitful in incident. The death of his elder brother, already mentioned, was the one event that nearly touched his heart and spirits. Its effect had been, with the loss of some other friends about the same time, to produce, he said, "a certain deadness to everything." It had brought home to him his loneliness, and moreover served to increase a long-felt weariness of the monotony of office life. Already, in the beginning of 1822, he was telling Wordsworth, "I grow ominously tired of official confinement. ~~Thirty~~ years have I served the Philistines, and my neck is not ~~subdued~~ to the yoke. You don't know how wearisome it is to breathe the air of four pent walls, without relief, day after day, all the golden hours of the day between ten and four, without ease or interposition. *Tædet me harum quotidianarum formarum*, these pestilential clerk-faces always in one's dish. . . . I dare not whisper to myself a pension on this side of absolute incapacitation and infirmity, till years have sucked me dry—*otium cum indignitate*. I had thought in a green old age (O green

thought!) to have retired to Ponder's End, emblematic name, how beautiful! in the Ware Road, there to have made up my accounts with Heaven and the Company, toddling about it between it and Cheshunt, anon stretching, on some fine Izaak Walton morning, to Hoddesden or Amwell, careless as a beggar; but walking, walking ever till I fairly walked myself off my legs, dying walking! The hope is gone. I sit like Philomel all day (but not singing) with my heart against this thorn of a desk." Very touching, by the side of the delightful suggestion of Ponder's End, is the dream of retirement to the Ware Road—the road, that is to say, that led to Widford and Blakesware. If these were not to him exactly what Auburn was to Goldsmith, he still at times had hopes—

"His long vexation past,
There to return, and die at home at last."

Three years were, however, to elapse before he was at liberty to choose his own place of residence. It is significant that though he could never bring himself to live quite beyond reach of town, and the "sweet security of streets," it was in the Hertfordshire direction that he turned in his last days, and died as it were half-way between London and that quiet Hertfordshire village, the two places he loved best on earth.

There was one incident in those Russell Street days that would have been an event indeed in the life of most home-keeping men who had reached middle life without having once left English shores. In the summer holiday of 1822 Charles and his sister made a trip to Paris. At whose suggestion, or in obedience to what sudden impulse, they were led to make so violent a change in their usual habits, there is nothing to show. They left England in

the middle of June, and two months later we find Mary Lamb still in Paris, and seeing the sights under the direction of their friend, Crabb Robinson. Charles, who had returned earlier to England, had left a characteristic note of instructions for his sister's guidance, advising her to walk along the "Borough side of the Seine," where she would find a mile and a half of print-shops and book-stalls. "Then," he adds, not unfairly describing a first impression of Père-la-Chaise, "there is a place where the Paris people put all their dead people, and bring them flowers and dolls and gingerbread-nuts and sonnets and such trifles; and that is all, I think, worth seeing as sights, except that the streets and shops of Paris are themselves the best sight." In a note to Barron Field on his return, he adds a few more of his experiences, how he had eaten frogs, fricasseed, "the nicest little delicate things," and how the Seine was "exactly the size to run through a magnificent street."

He finds time, however, to add to his hasty note the pleasant intelligence that he had met Talma. Kenney, the dramatist, was at this time living at Versailles, and to him Lamb owed this introduction. Talma had lately given a thousand francs for what he was assured was an authentic portrait of Shakspeare, and he invited Kenney to bring Lamb to see it. "It is painted," Lamb writes, "on the one half of a pair of bellows, a lovely picture, corresponding with the folio head." It is hard to believe that Lamb had any doubts about the spuriousness of this relic, though his language on the point is dubious. He quotes the rhymes "in old carved wooden letters" that surrounded the portrait, and adds the significant remark that Ireland was not found out by his parchments, but by his poetry. And perhaps he did not wish to hurt Talma's

feelings. It was arranged that the party should see the tragedian in *Regulus* the same evening, and that he should sup with them after the performance. Lamb, we are told, "could not at all enter into the spirit of French acting, and in his general distaste made no exception in favour of his intended guest. This, however, did not prevent their mutual and high relish of each other's character and conversation, nor was any allusion made to the performance, till, on rising to go, Talma inquired how he liked it. Lamb shook his head and smiled. 'Ah!' said Talma. 'I was not very happy to-night: you must see me in *Sylla*.' 'Incidit in Scyllam,' said Lamb, 'qui vult vitare Charybdim.' 'Ah! you are a rogue; you are a great rogue,' said Talma, shaking him cordially by the hand, as they parted."

There is a sad story, only too likely to be true, that Mary Lamb was seized with one of her old attacks on the journey, and had to be left at Amiens in charge of her attendant. If so, it may account for her brother avoiding the subject in later essays and letters. An Elia essay embodying even the surface impressions of a month's stay in Paris would have been a welcome addition to the number. Lamb was usually prompt to seize on the latest incident in his life and turn it to this purpose. When short-sighted George Dyer, leaving the cottage at Islington, walked straight into the New River in broad daylight, the adventure appears the very next month in the *London Magazine*, under the heading of *Amicus Redivivus*. But France and the French do not seem to have opened any new vein of humour or observation. In truth, Lamb was unused to let his sympathies go forth save in certain customary directions. Any persons, and any book that he had come to know well—any one of the "old familiar faces"—

served to draw out those sympathies. But novelties he almost always passed by unmoved.

The first series of Lamb's essays, under the title of *Elia—Essays that have appeared under that signature in the London Magazine*—was published in a single volume by Taylor and Hessey at the opening of the year 1823. It contained the contributions of something less than two years. As yet there was assuredly no sign of failing power in the brain and heart that produced them. Nor did Lamb cease to contribute to the magazine and elsewhere after the appearance of the first volume. The second series, published ten years later, is an exception to the rule that sequels must necessarily be failures. *Old China* and *Poor Relations*, the *Old Margate Hoy*, *Blakesmoor*, *Barbara S.*, and the *Superannuated Man*, which are found in the second series, exhibit all Lamb's qualities at their highest. It was perhaps only a passing mood of melancholy that made him write to Bernard Barton, in March, 1823, when the book had already begun to make its mark: "They have dragged me again into the magazine, but I feel the spirit of the thing in my own mind quite gone. 'Some brains' (I think Ben Jonson says it) 'will endure but one skimming.'" But another cause for this depression may have been at work. There was a painful incident connected with the *Elia* volume from the first, for which even the quick appreciation of the public could not compensate. There had been one exception to the welcome with which the book had been greeted. A word of grave disapprobation, or what had seemed such to Lamb, had been heard amid the chorus of approval, and this word had been spoken by a dear and valued friend.

In the *Quarterly Review* of January, 1823, appeared an article, known to be by Southey, professing to be a review

of a work by Gregoire, ex-Bishop of Blois, on the rise and progress of Deism in France. After the fashion of reviewers, Southey had made the book an occasion for a general survey of the progress of free-thought in England as well as abroad, and the article was issued with the alarming title, *Progress of Infidelity*. Towards its close Southey is led very characteristically into many general reflections on the reasonableness of belief, and the unreasonableness of scepticism, and while engaged on this line of thought, it seems to have occurred to him that he might at once "point a moral" and call attention to a friend's book, by a quotation from the then newly published volume of Lamb. And this is how he set about it:

"Unbelievers have not always been honest enough thus to express their real feelings; but this we know concerning them, that when they have renounced their birthright of hope, they have not been able to divest themselves of fear. From the nature of the human mind this might be presumed, and in fact it is so. They may deaden the heart and stupefy the conscience, but they cannot destroy the imaginative faculty. There is a remarkable proof of this in *Elia's Essays*, a book which wants only a sounder religious feeling, to be as delightful as it is original. In that upon *Witches and other Night Fears*, he says: 'It is not book or picture, or the stories of foolish servants, which create these terrors in children. They can at most but give them a direction. Dear little T. H., who of all children has been brought up with the most scrupulous exclusion of every taint of superstition, who was never allowed to hear of goblin or apparition, or scarcely to be told of bad men, or to hear or read of any distressing story, finds all this world of fear, from which he has been so rigidly excluded *ab extra*, in his own "thick-coming

fancies;" and from his little midnight pillow this nurse-child of optimism will start at shapes, unborrowed of tradition, in sweats to which the reveries of the cell-damned murderer are tranquillity."

I have had occasion to refer to this essay before, in speaking of Lamb's childhood. For, as usual, it originated in his own experience. He was led to relate how from the age of four to seven his nightly sleep had been disturbed by childish terrors, in which the grim picture of Saul and the Witch, in Stackhouse's *History of the Bible*, had borne so prominent a part. And then, in order to strengthen his argument that these terrors are nervous, and not to be traced to any gloomy or improper religious training, he cites the parallel case, within his own knowledge, of "dear little T. H." All Lamb's friends and associates knew that this was little Thornton Hunt, Leigh Hunt's eldest son. The use of initials was really no disguise at all. Lamb admitted in his subsequent remonstrance with Southey that to call him T. H. was "as good as naming him." If the sanctity of private life had been violated, it was certainly Lamb who had set the example. But, as certainly, he had said nothing to the discredit of the poor child or his parents. According to the ethics of journalism current sixty years ago there was nothing uncommon in this way of indicating living people. Lamb was specially fond of bringing in his friends and acquaintances by their initials. His own family, Coleridge, Norris, Barron Field, and many others, occur repeatedly in his writings in this guise. He was intimate with Leigh Hunt and his young family, and sincerely attached to them. Nothing had been further from his thoughts than to cast any kind of slight upon the little boy, "Thornton Hunt, my favourite child," or his educators. It must therefore have been

with something more than disgust that he found the *Quarterly* reviewer, proceeding, after the passage just cited, to point out with unmistakable *animus* that such nervous terrors were easily to be accounted for in the case of one who had been brought up in ignorance of all the facts and consolations of the Christian religion.

It is possible that this gratuitous attack upon a political opponent, through his own child, was not added to the article until after it had left Southey's hands. All that we know from Southey himself is that his sole object in mentioning Lamb's volume had been to call attention to its general merits—that he had in the first instance written “a *saner* religious feeling,” which was the word that exactly expressed his meaning; that happily remembering in time the previous history of the Lamb family, he had hastily changed the word to “*sounder*,” meaning to re-cast the sentence when the article returned to him in proof, and that the opportunity never came. We may be sure that this explanation represents the whole truth. Southey had written to his friend Wynn, in the very month in which the article appeared: “Read *Elia*, if the book has not fallen in your way. It is by my old friend, Charles Lamb. There are some things in it which will offend, and some which will pain you, as they do me; but you will find in it a rich vein of pure gold.” And the things which pained him were certainly of a kind about which the word *sane* might be more properly used than the word *sound*. Lamb was probably mistaken in thinking that Southey referred to certain familiarities, if not flippancies, of expression on serious subjects that he may at times have indulged in. On this score he had a fair retort ready in the various ballads of *diablerie* that Southey had not disdained to write, and to publish. Nor was Southey, we may be sure,

offended by so genuinely earnest a plea for temperance and rational gratitude as is contained in the essay *Grace before Meat*. Rather (as Lamb evidently suspected) was it such a vein of speculation as that followed out in *New Year's Eve*, which would cause a strange chill to the simple faith and steadfast hopefulness of his friend. As I have said, Lamb seems in this essay to have written with the express purpose of presenting the reverse side of a passage in his favourite *Religio Medici*. Sir Thomas Browne had there written: "I thank God I have not those strait ligaments, or narrow obligations to the world, as to dote on life, or be convulsed and tremble at the name of death." "When I take a full view and circle of myself without this reasonable moderator, and equal piece of justice, death, I do conceive myself the miserablest person extant." Lamb may have argued (in the very words applied to this treatise in the essay on *Imperfect Sympathies*) that it was all very well for the author of the *Religio Medici*, "mounted upon the airy stilts of abstraction," to "overlook the impertinent individualities of such poor concretions as mankind," but that to him, Elia, death meant something by no means to be defined as a "reasonable moderator," and "equal piece of justice." He clung to the things he saw and loved—the friends, the books, the streets and crowds around him, and he was not ashamed to confess that death meant for him the absence of all these, and that he could not look it steadfastly in the face.

It is worth noticing that the profound melancholy of this essay had already attracted attention, and formed the subject of a copy of verses, in the form of a *Poetical Epistle to Elia*, signed "Olen," in the *London Magazine* for August, 1821. Elia had been there taken to task, in lines of much eloquence and feeling, for his negative views on

the subject of a future life. And indeed, for all the dallying with paradox, and the free blending of fact with fiction, in this singular paper, the fragments of personal confession are very remarkable. There are few things in literature more pathetic than the contrast drawn between the two stages of his own life, as if he would have given the lie sadly to his friend's adage about the child being father of the man :

"If I know aught of myself, no one whose mind is introspective—and mine is painfully so—can have a less respect for his present identity, than I have for the man Elia. I know him to be light, and vain, and humoursome; a notorious . . . ; addicted to . . . ; averse from counsel, neither taking it nor offering it; . . . besides; a stammering buffoon; what you will; lay it on, and spare not; I subscribe to it all, and much more than thou canst be willing to lay at his door—but for the child Elia—that 'other me' there in the background—I must take leave to cherish the remembrance of that young master, with as little reference, I protest, to this stupid changeling of five-and-forty as if it had been a child of some other house, and not of my parents. I can cry over its patient small-pox at five, and rougher medicaments. I can lay its poor fevered head upon the sick pillow at Christ's, and wake with it in surprise at the gentle posture of maternal tenderness hanging over it, that unknown had watched its sleep. I know how it shrank from any the least colour of falsehood. God help thee, Elia, how art thou changed! Thou art sophisticated. I know how honest, how courageous (for a weakling) it was; how religious, how imaginative, how hopeful! From what have I not fallen if the child I remember was indeed myself, and not some dissembling guardian, presenting a false identity, to give the rule to my unpractised steps, and regulate the tone of my moral being."

Although the gloom is relieved by no ray of hope or consolation, the reality of the self-reproach might well have saved the writer from criticism, even as to the "sanity" of his religious feeling.

Lamb was annoyed, rather than deeply hurt, by the attack upon himself. He had old grievances against the *Quarterly Review*. Eight or nine years before, he had written for it a review of Wordsworth's *Excursion*, which Gifford inserted after alterations that Lamb compared to pulling out the eyes and leaving only the bleeding sockets. "I cannot give you an idea of what he (Gifford) has done to it," he wrote to Wordsworth. "The *language* he has altered throughout. Whatever inadequateness it had to its subject, it was, in point of composition, the prettiest piece of prose I ever writ." And it is clear from the article itself, as it appears in the number for October, 1814, that this language is not exaggerated. The sweetness and delicate perception of the author are there, but the diction bears little of his peculiar mark. Then had come the unfortunate reference to the *Confessions of a Drunkard*, already mentioned. In general the *Quarterly* set were in implacable opposition to the Lamb set, and now, not for the first time, he had to hear hard things said, not only of himself, but of those who were bound to him by ties of strong affection. He seems not to have been informed of the attack till some months after its appearance. It is not till the July following, at least, that any mention of it occurs in his letters. In that month he writes to Bernard Barton: "Southey has attacked *Elia* on the score of infidelity, in the *Quarterly* article, *Progress of Infidelity*. He might have spared an old friend such a construction of a few careless flights, that meant no harm to religion. If all *his* unguarded expressions on the subject were to be collected—but I love and respect Southey, and will not retort. I hate his review and his being a reviewer. The hint he has dropped will knock the sale of the book on the head, which was almost at a stop before." This last

apprehension was evidently groundless. There is no reason to suppose that the book made its way more slowly for the paragraph in the review. For whatever here and there is morbid in them, the *Essays* themselves contain the best antidote.

Lamb could not resist the opportunity it afforded him for a fresh essay of *Elia*, and in the *London* for October, 1823, appeared the *Letter of Elia to Robert Southey, Esq.* As a whole, it is not one of Lamb's happiest efforts. His more valid grounds of complaint against the review are set forth with sufficient dignity and force. He urges quite fairly that to say a book "wants a sounder religious feeling," is to say either too much or too little. And the indecency of attacking Leigh Hunt through his own child, a boy of twelve, is properly rebuked. But when Lamb carries the war into the enemy's territory, he is less successful. As two blacks do not make a white, it was beside the mark to make laborious fun over Southey's youthful ballads; and the grievances as to the fees extorted from visitors to Westminster Abbey comes in rather flatly as a peroration. The concluding paragraphs of the letter are the only portions that Lamb afterwards thought well to reprint. They appeared, ten years later, in the Second Series of *Elia* under the title of *Tombs of the Abbey*. The letter, as a whole, is given in Talfourd's *Memorials*.

Lamb was not so deeply moved by Southey's criticism but that he could make some sport over his annoyance. What actually galled him was the attack, through himself, upon a friend. In previous articles in the same Review he had found himself complimented at the expense of another friend, William Hazlitt. And now he took the opportunity to vindicate his friendship for both Hunt and Hazlitt in a passage that forms the most interesting and

valuable portion of the letter. There had been a coolness, he tells us, between himself and Hazlitt, and it is pleasant to know that Lamb's generosity of tone at this time helped to make the relations between them once more cordial. "Protesting," he says, "against much that he has written, and some things which he chooses to do; judging him by his conversation which I enjoyed so long, and relished so deeply; or by his books, in those places where no clouding passion intervenes, I should belie my own conscience if I said less than that I think W. H. to be, in his natural and healthy state, one of the wisest and finest spirits breathing. So far from being ashamed of that intimacy which was betwixt us, it is my boast that I was able for so many years to have preserved it entire; and I think I shall go to my grave without finding or expecting to find such another companion." Not less manly and noble is the justification of his steady friendship for Leigh Hunt, at that time living abroad, and with a reputation in England of ill savour with those to whom the pages of the *Quarterly* were addressed. "L. H. is now in Italy; on his departure to which land, with much regret, I took my leave of him and of his little family, seven of them, sir, with their mother, and as kind a set of little people (T. H. and all), as affectionate children as ever blessed a parent. Had you seen them, sir, I think you could not have looked upon them as so many little Jonases, but rather as pledges of the vessel's safety, that was to bear such a freight of love. I wish you would read Mr. H.'s lines to that same T. H., 'six years old, during a sickness'—

"Sleep breaks at last from out thee,
My little patient boy'—

(they are to be found on the 47th page of *Foliage*)—and

ask yourself how far they are out of the spirit of Christianity."

As he wrote these words, Lamb may have recalled how his own unfailing sympathy had been a comfort to this friend in those darker days when Leigh Hunt was undergoing his two years' imprisonment in the Surrey jail for his newspaper attack on the Prince Regent. Lamb and his sister were among the Hunts' most regular visitors at that time. "My eldest little boy," writes Hunt in his *Autobiography*, "was my constant companion, and we used to play all sorts of juvenile games together." And it was on watching the child at play among the congenial surroundings of prison life that Lamb had written his own lines to "T. L. H.—a child," comforting child and father with the thought that the time of deliverance was at hand, when the boy would be once more in his native element, breathing the healthful air and plucking the wild flowers on Hampstead Heath. Lamb was always tender over children, and these lines have a simplicity, over and above their studied quaintness, that savours pleasantly of Blake:

"Guileless traitor, rebel mild,
Convict unconscious, culprit-child!
Gates that close with iron roar
Have been to thee thy nursery door:
Chains that chink in cheerless cells
Have been thy rattles and thy bells:
Walls contrived for giant sin
Have hemmed thy faultless weakness in:
Near thy sinless bed black guilt
Her discordant house hath built,
And filled it with her monstrous brood—
Sights by thee not understood—
Sights of fear, and of distress,
That pass a harmless infant's guess!

But the clouds that overcast
 Thy young morning may not last.
 Soon shall arrive the rescuing hour
 That yields thee up to Nature's power.
 Nature that so late doth greet thee
 Shall in o'erflowing measure meet thee.
 She shall recompense with cost
 For every lesson thou hast lost.
 Then wandering up thy sire's loved hill
 Thou shalt take thy airy fill
 Of health and pastime. *Birds shall sing*
For thy delight each May morning.
 'Mid new-yeaned lambkins thou shalt play,
 Hardly less a lamb than they.
 Then thy prison's lengthened bound
 Shall be the horizon skirting round.
 And, while thou fill'st thy lap with flowers
 To make amends for wintry hours,
 The breeze, the sunshine, and the place,
 Shall from thy tender brow efface
 Each vestige of untimely care
 That sour restraint had graven there;
 And on thy every look impress
 A more excelling childishness.
 So shall be thy days beguiled,
 Thornton Hunt, my favourite child."

Southey first learned from the pages of the *London Magazine* the effect of the language used by him in the *Quarterly Review*. "On my part," he wrote to his publisher, after reading Lamb's epistle, "there was not even a momentary feeling of anger. I was very much surprised and grieved, because I knew how much he would condemn himself, and yet no resentful letter was ever written less offensively; his gentle nature may be seen in it throughout." Southey was in London in the month after the publication of Lamb's remonstrance, and wrote him a letter in

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language full of affection and sorrow. The soreness at once passed away. "Dear Southey," he replied, "the kindness of your note has melted away the mist which was upon me. I have been fighting against a shadow. That accursed *Q. R.* had vexed me by a gratuitous speaking, of its own knowledge, that the *Confessions of a D——d* was a genuine description of the state of the writer. Little things that are not ill meant may produce much ill. *That* might have injured me alive and dead: I am in a public office, and my life is insured. I was prepared for anger, and I thought I saw in a few obnoxious words a hard case of repetition directed against me. I wish both *Magazine and Review* at the bottom of the sea. I shall be ashamed to see you, and my sister (though innocent) still more so; for the folly was done without her knowledge, and has made her uneasy ever since. My guardian angel was absent at that time. I will muster up courage to see you, however, any day next week. We shall hope that you will bring Edith with you. That will be a second mortification. She will hate to see us; but come, and heap embers. We deserve it—I for what I've done, and she for being my sister." The visit was paid, and the old intimacy renewed, never again to be weakened by unkindly word.

In this note to Southey, Lamb has to tell of a change of address. In August of this year he and his sister had finally moved from Russell Street, and for the first time in their united lives became householders. The rooms over the brazier's had from the first had many drawbacks, and for some years the brother and sister had occasionally retired to a rural lodging at Dalston, partly to enjoy a short respite from the din of the theatres and the market, but chiefly that Charles might be able to write without interruption from the increasing band of intruders on his scanty lei-

sure. There is a pretty glimpse of one such period of retreat in a note to Miss Hutchinson of April in this year: "Meanwhile of afternoons we pick up primroses at Dalston, and Mary corrects me when I call 'em cowslips." And now they resolved to fix their tent permanently within reach of primroses and cowslips, and Charles must tell the story in his own words. He writes to Bernard Barton: "When you come Londonward, you will find me no longer in Covent Garden. I have a cottage in Colebrook Row, Islington; a cottage, for it is detached; a white house with six good rooms; the New River (rather elderly by this time) runs (if a moderate walking pace can be so termed) close to the foot of the house; and behind is a spacious garden with vines (I assure you), pears, strawberries, parsnips, leeks, carrots, cabbages, to delight the heart of old Alcinous. You enter without passage into a cheerful dining-room, all studded over and rough with old books; and above is a lightsome drawing-room, three windows, full of choice prints. I feel like a great lord, never having had a house before." The sequel must be given, so amusingly illustrative of the snares and pitfalls that are inseparable even from rural felicity: "I am so taken up with pruning and gardening, quite a new sort of occupation to me. I have gathered my Jargonels, but my Windsor pears are backward. The former were of exquisite raciness. I do now sit under my own vine and contemplate the growth of vegetable nature. I can now understand in what sense they speak of father Adam. I recognize the paternity while I watch my tulips. I almost fell with him, for the first day I turned a drunken gardener (as he let in the serpent) into my Eden, and he laid about him, lopping off some choice boughs, &c., which hung over from a neighbour's garden, and in his blind zeal

laid waste a shade which had sheltered their window from the gaze of passers-by. The old gentlewoman (fury made her not handsome) could scarcely be reconciled by all my fine words. There was no buttering her parsnips. She talked of the law. What a lapse to commit on the first day of my happy 'garden state!'

The same letter tells of the failing fortunes of the *London Magazine*. Lamb was still contributing to its pages, though not so regularly as of old. He speaks of himself as lingering among its creaking rafters, like the last rat, and of many ominous secessions from the ranks of its old supporters. Hazlitt and Procter had forsaken it, and with them one who might well have been spared before, the wretched Wainwright, who had contributed to its pages various flimsy and conceited rhapsodies on art and letters. It is characteristic of Lamb that he always finds some good-natured word to say of this man, such as "kind" or "light-hearted," principally, no doubt, because the others of his set looked on him with some suspicion. It was his way to seek for the redeeming qualities in those the world looked coldly on. He did not live to know the worst of this now notorious hypocrite and scoundrel.

In their autumn holiday of 1823, Charles and Mary Lamb made an acquaintance destined for the next ten years to add a new and most happy interest to their lonely lives. They were still faithful to the University towns in vacation time, and at the house of a friend in Cambridge, where Charles liked to play his evening game at whist, they found a little girl, the orphan daughter of Charles Isola, one of the Esquire Bedells of the University; her grandfather, an Italian refugee, having settled in Cambridge as teacher of his own language. The child, who was at other times at school, spent her holidays with an

aunt in Cambridge. The Lambs took a strong fancy to her, invited her to stay with them during her next holidays, and finally adopted her. She called them uncle and aunt, and their house was generally her home, until her marriage with Mr. Moxon, the publisher, in 1833. The education of this young girl became the constant care of the brother and sister. They wished to give her the means of becoming herself a teacher, in the event of her not marrying, and while Charles taught her Latin, Mary Lamb worked hard at French that she might assist her young pupil. Many are the allusions in the letters of the last years to "our Emma;" and as Mary Lamb's periods of mental derangement became more and more frequent and protracted, this new relationship became ever a greater comfort to them both.

In the meantime Charles was fretting under the unbroken confinement of office life. "I have been insuperably dull and lethargic for many weeks," he writes to Bernard Barton early in 1824, "and cannot rise to the vigour of a letter, much less an essay. The *London* must do without me for a time, for I have lost all interest about it." A subsequent letter, in August, tells the same tale of increasing weariness. "The same indisposition to write has stopped my 'Elias,' but you will see a futile effort in the next number, 'wrung from me with slow pain.' The fact is, my head is seldom cool enough. I am dreadfully indolent." The "futile effort" in the next number was no other than the beautiful essay on *Blakesmoor*, fresh proof (if any were needed) that "difficult writing" need not make itself felt as such by the reader. Nothing more unforced in style ever came from Charles Lamb's hand—no sentences more perfect in feeling and expression than those with which it ends:

"Mine, too—whose else?—the costly fruit-garden, with its sun-baked southern wall; the ampler pleasure-garden, rising backwards from the house in triple terraces, with flower-pots, now of palest lead, save that a speck, here and there, saved from the elements, bespoke their pristine state to have been gilt and glittering; the verdant quarters, backward still; and, stretching still beyond, in old formality, the firry wilderness, the haunt of the squirrel and the day-long-murmuring wood-pigeon, with that antique image in the centre, god or goddess I wist not; but child of Athens or old Rome paid never a sincerer worship to Pan or to Sylvanus in their native groves, than I to that fragmental mystery.

"Was it for this that I kissed my childish hands too fervently in your idol worship, walks and windings of Blakesmoor! for this, or what sin of mine, has the plough passed over your pleasant places? I sometimes think that as men, when they die, do not die all, so of their extinguished habitations there may be a hope—a germ to be revived."

The "firry wilderness" still remains, and in the grassy meadow where house and garden once stood may faintly be traced the undulations of the ground where the triple terraces rose backwards; but this is all of the actual Blakesmoor that survives. Yet in this very essay Lamb has fulfilled his own happy vision, and revived for all time that "extinguished habitation."

In spite of indolence and low spirits, the hand of Lamb had not lost its cunning, as the pretty Album verses written for Bernard Barton's daughter, Lucy, sufficiently testify. They were sent to Barton at the end of this month, September. "I am ill at these numbers," he pleaded, "but if the above be not too mean to have a place in thy daughter's sanctum, take them with pleasure." The lines are interesting, as giving another proof of Lamb's native sympathy with the Quaker simplicity. His *Elia* essay on the *Quakers' Meeting* has shown it. He had impressed Leigh Hunt, when a boy, by his Quaker-like demeanour.

He had conveyed to Hood, we remember, on their first meeting, the idea of a "Quaker in black." He had told Barton in an earlier letter, "In feelings, and matters not dogmatical, I hope I am half a Quaker." And here, taking the word *Album* as text, "little book, surnamed of *White*," he descants on the themes alone fitted to find shelter in such a home:

"Whitest thoughts, in whitest dress,
Candid meanings, best express
Mind of quiet Quakeress."

In February and March of the following year, his letters to Barton—the correspondent who now drew forth his best and most varied powers—show that the desire for rest was becoming irritably strong. "Your gentleman brother sets my mouth watering after liberty. Oh that I were kicked out of Leadenhall with every mark of indignity, and a competence in my fob. The birds of the air would not be so free as I should. How I would prance and curvet it, and pick up cowslips, and ramble about purposeless as an idiot!" Later in March we learn that he had conveyed to the Directors of the East India Company his willingness to resign. "I am sick of hope deferred," he writes. "The grand wheel is in agitation that is to turn up my fortune; but round it rolls, and will turn up nothing. I have a glimpse of freedom, of becoming a gentleman at large, but I am put off from day to day. I have offered my resignation, and it is neither accepted nor rejected. Eight weeks am I kept in this fearful suspense. Guess what an absorbing state I feel it. I am not conscious of the existence of friends, present or absent. The East India Directors alone can be that thing to me, or not. I

have just learned that nothing will be decided this week. Why the next? why any week?"

When he wrote these words, the gratification of his hopes was nearer than he thought. He can scarcely have had any serious anxiety as to the result of his application. Some weeks before he had received some kind of intimation that the matter might be arranged to his satisfaction, and his medical friends had certified that failing health and spirits made the step at least desirable. But he had served only thirty-three years, and it was not unusual for clerks to complete a term of forty or fifty years' service, so that he may have had some uneasy doubts as to the amount of pension. But all doubts were happily dispelled on the last Tuesday in March, 1825, when the Directors sent for him and acquainted him with the resolution they had passed.

Lamb has described this interview in several letters, but nowhere so fully as in the *Elia* essay, the *Superannuated Man*, which, after his custom, he at once prepared for the next month's *London Magazine*. With the one exception, that he transforms the Directors of the India House into a private firm of merchants, and with one or two other slight changes of detail, the account seems to be a faithful version of what actually happened:

"A week passed in this manner, the most anxious one, I verily believe, in my life, when on the evening of the 12th of April, just as I was about quitting my desk to go home (it might be about eight o'clock) I received an awful summons to attend the presence of the whole assembled firm in the formidable back parlour. I thought, Now my time has surely come; I have done for myself. I am going to be told that they have no longer occasion for me. L——, I could see, smiled at the terror I was in, which was a little relief to me; when to my utter astonishment, B——, the eldest partner, began a formal harangue to me on the length of my services, my very meri-

torious conduct during the whole of the time (the deuce, thought I, how did he find out that? I protest I never had the confidence to think as much). He went on to descant on the expediency of retiring at a certain time of life (how my heart panted!), and asking me a few questions as to the amount of my own property, of which I have a little, ended with a proposal, to which his three partners nodded a grave assent, that I should accept from the house which I had served so well a pension for life to the amount of two-thirds of my accustomed salary—a magnificent offer! I do not know what I answered between surprise and gratitude, but it was understood that I accepted their proposal, and I was told that I was free from that hour to leave their service. I stammered out a bow, and at just ten minutes after eight I went home—for ever."

The munificence thus recorded was happily no fiction. Lamb's full salary at the time was little short of seven hundred a year, and the offer made to him was a pension of four hundred and fifty, with a deduction of nine pounds a year to secure a fitting provision for his sister, in the event of her surviving him. "Here am I," he writes to Wordsworth, "after thirty-three years' slavery, sitting in my own room at eleven o'clock, this finest of all April mornings, a freed man, with 441*l.* a year for the remainder of my life, live I as long as John Dennis, who outlived his annuity, and starved at ninety."

The East India Directors seem to have been generous and considerate in a marked degree. If they wished to pay some compliment to literature in the person of their distinguished clerk, it was not less to their credit. But in spite of Lamb's modest language as to his official claims upon their kindness, it would seem that he served them steadily and faithfully during those thirty-three years. Save for his brief annual holiday, he stuck to his post. He wrote his letters from the desk in Leadenhall Street, and received some of his callers there, but there is nothing

to show that he neglected his daily work. He had sometimes to tell of headache and indisposition, as when he had been dining with the poets the night before, where they had not "quaffed Hippocrène, but Hippocrass rather." And there is a tradition—not to be too curiously questioned—that on occasion of being reproved for coming to the office late in the mornings, he pleaded that he made up for it by going away very early. But these peccadilloes are as nothing set against the long extent of actual service, and the hearty and spontaneous action of his employers at its close.

Though Lamb had always fretted against what he called his slavery to the "desk's dead wood," the discipline of regular, and even of mechanical work, was of infinite service to him. With his special temperament, bodily and mental, he needed, of all men, the compulsion of duty. The "unchartered freedom" and the "weight of chance desires," which his friend Wordsworth has so feelingly lamented, would have been shipwreck to him. When deliverance from the necessity of toil came, he could not altogether resist their baneful effects. And we may be sure that we should not have had more, but fewer *Essays of Elia*, if the daily routine of different labour had been less severe or regular. He was well paid for the best of his literary work, but there was no pressure upon him to write for bread. "Thank God," he writes to Bernard Barton, "you and I are something besides being writers! There is corn in Egypt, while there is cash at Leadenhall!"

CHAPTER VIII.

ENFIELD AND EDMONTON.

[1826-1834.]

"I CAME home FOR EVER on Tuesday in last week," Lamb writes to Wordsworth, on the 6th of April, 1825. "The incomprehensibleness of my condition overwhelmed me. It was like passing from life into eternity. Every year to be as long as three, *i. e.*, to have three times as much real time—time that is my own, in it! I wandered about thinking I was happy, but feeling I was not. But that tumultuousness is passing off, and I begin to understand the nature of the gift. Holidays, even the annual month, were always uneasy joys: their conscious fugitiveness; the craving after making the most of them. Now, when all is holiday, there are no holidays. I can sit at home, in rain or shine, without a restless impulse for walkings. I am daily steadying, and shall soon find it as natural to me to be my own master, as it has been irksome to have had a master. Mary wakes every morning with an obscure feeling that some good has happened to us."

Certain misgivings as to the consequences of the step he had taken are apparent here, even in his words of congratulation. They appear elsewhere, as in a letter to Barton of the same month, where he tells how the day before he

had gone back and sat at his old desk among his old companions, and felt yearnings at having left them in the lurch. Still, he was forcing himself to take the most hopeful view of the change in his life, and the essay on the *Superannuated Man*, that appeared a month later in the *London*, elaborates with excellent skill the feelings which he wished to cultivate and preserve. "A man can never have too much Time to himself, nor too little to do. Had I a little son, I would christen him Nothing-to-do; he should do nothing. Man, I verily believe, is out of his element as long as he is operative. I am altogether for the life contemplative."

One of the earliest uses that he made of his freedom was to pay visits out of London with Mary. In the summer they are at Enfield, having quiet holidays. "Mary walks her twelve miles a day some days," Charles writes to Southey in August, "and I my twenty on others. 'Tis all holiday with me now, you know. The change works admirably." But as time went on, the change was found to be less admirable. The spur and the discipline of regular hours and occupation being taken away, Lamb had to make occupation, or else to find amusement in its stead. He had been always fond of walking, and he now tried the experiment of a companion in his walks in the shape of a dog, Dash, that Hood had given him. But the dog proved unmanageable, and was fond of running away down any other streets than those intended by his master, and Lamb had to part with him a year or two later in despair. He passed Dash on to Mr. Patmore, and to this change of ownership we owe the amusing letter in which he writes for information as to the dog's welfare. "Dear P., excuse my anxiety, but how is Dash? I should have asked if Mrs. Patmore kept her rules, and was improving; but Dash

came uppermost. The order of our thought should be the order of our writing. Goes he muzzled, or *aperto ore*? Are his intellects sound, or does he wander a little in *his* conversation? You cannot be too careful to watch the first symptoms of incoherence. The first illogical snarl he makes—to St. Luke's with him. All the dogs here are going mad, if you can believe the overseers: but I protest, they seem to me very rational and collected. But nothing is so deceitful as mad people, to those who are not used to them. Try him with hot water; if he won't lick it up it is a sign—he does not like it. Does his tail wag horizontally, or perpendicularly? That has decided the fate of many dogs in Enfield. Is his general deportment cheerful? I mean when he is pleased, for otherwise there is no judging. You can't be too careful. Has he bit any of the children yet? If he has, have them shot, and keep *him* for curiosity, to see if it is the hydrophobia—and so this “excellent fooling” rambles on into still wilder extravagances. “We are dawdling our time away very idly and pleasantly,” the letter concludes, “at a Mrs. Leishman's, Chace, Enfield, where if you come a hunting, we can give you cold meat and a tankard.” For two years from the time of his leaving the India House, the brother and sister paid occasional visits to Mrs. Leishman's lodgings, until, finally, in 1827, they became sole tenants of the little house, furnished.

The year 1827 opened sadly for Charles and Mary Lamb. Since the death of their father, thirty years before, they had not had to mourn the loss of many friends connected with their early life. Their brother John had died five years before—but he had helped to make their real loneliness felt, rather than to relieve it—and they had no other near relations. But there was one dear friend of the

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family, who had been associated with them in their seasons of heaviest sorrow and hardest struggle. This was Mr. Randal Norris, for many years sub-treasurer and librarian of the Inner Temple, whose name has occurred so often in Lamb's letters and essays. The families of Norris and Lamb were united by more than one bond of friendship. They were neighbours in the Temple for many years, and Mrs. Norris was a native of Widford, and a friend of the old housekeeper at Blakesware. And now Charles writes to Crabb Robinson to tell him that this, his oldest friend, is dying. "In him I have a loss the world cannot make up. He was my friend and my father's friend all the life I can remember. I seem to have made foolish friendships ever since. These are friendships which outlive a second generation. Old as I am waxing, in his eyes I was still the child he first knew me. To the last he called me Charley. I have none to call me Charley now. He was the last link that bound me to the Temple. You are but of yesterday. In him seem to have died the old plainness of manners and singleness of heart." In a few days the lingering illness was over, and the old friend was laid to rest in the Temple Church-yard.

During the year that followed, Lamb found a congenial occupation, and a healthy substitute for his old regular hours, in working daily at the British Museum. He wished to assist Hone, the editor of the *Every Day Book*, and undertook to make extracts, on the plan of his former volumes of Dramatic Specimens, from the collection of plays bequeathed by Garrick to the British Museum, for publication in *Hone's Table Book*. "It is a sort of office-work to me," he writes to Barton, "hours, ten to four, the same. It does me good. Man must have regular occupation that has been used to it." The extracts thus chosen were con-

fessedly but gleanings after the earlier volumes, and in the scanty comments prefixed to them there is a corresponding falling off in interest. The remark upon *Gorboduc*, that "there may be flesh and blood underneath, but we cannot get at it," shows the old keenness of observation. And it is pleasant to hear him repeat once more that the plays of Shakspeare have been the "strongest and sweetest food of his mind from infancy." But the real impetus to the study of the Great Elizabethans had been given in the volumes of 1808.

A series of short essays contributed in this same year to the *New Monthly Magazine*, under the title of *Popular Fallacies*, are for the most part of slight value. The one of these that was the author's favourite is suggested by the saying that "Home is home, though it is never so homely." The first exception that he propounds to the truth of this maxim is in the case of the "very poor." To places of cheap entertainment, and the benches of ale-houses, Lamb says, the poor man "resorts for an image of the home which he cannot find at home." Very touching is the picture he goes on to draw of the discrepancy between the "humble meal shared together," as described by the sentimentalist, and the grim irony of the actual facts. "The innocent prattle of his children takes out the sting of a man's poverty. But the children of the very poor do not prattle. It is none of the least frightful features in that condition that there is no childishness in its dwellings. Poor people, said a sensible nurse to us once, do not bring up their children, they drag them up." The whole passage is in a strain of more sustained earnestness than is usual with Lamb, and serves to show how widely his sympathetic heart had travelled. From this theme he turns to one which touched his own circum-

stances more nearly. There is yet another home, he says, which gives the lie to the popular saying. It may have all the material comforts that are wanting to the poor man, all its fireside conveniences, and yet be *no home*. "It is the house of the man that is infested with many visitors." And he goes on to draw the distinction between the noble-hearted friends that are always welcome, and the purposeless droppers in at meal-time, or just at the moment that you have sat down to a book. "They have a peculiarly compassionating sneer with which they hope that they do not interrupt your studies." It is Charles Lamb himself who is here publishing to the world the old grievance, which appears so constantly in his letters. He was being driven from Islington by the crowd of callers and droppers in, from whom he professed his inability to escape in any other way. Hardly is he settled at Enfield, in August, 1827, when he has to protest that the swarm of gnats follows him from place to place. "Whither can I take wing," he writes to Barton, "from the oppression of human faces? Would I were in a wilderness of apes, tossing cocoa-nuts about, grinning and grinned at!"

There is reason to believe, as already observed, that Lamb was in part responsible for these idle trespassers upon his time. He had not had the courage to keep them off when his days were fully occupied, and his evenings were his only time for literature; and now, when he passed for a man wholly at leisure, it was not likely that the annoyance would diminish. But the truth is, there was an element of irritability in Lamb, due to the family temperament, which the new life, though he could now "wander at his own sweet will," was little calculated to appease. The rest of which he dreamed, when he retired in the prime of life from professional work, could only

mean, to such a temperament as Lamb's, restlessness. He looked for relief from many troubles in the mere circumstance of change. It was the *calum, non animum*, disillusion that so many have had to experience. And at the same time he hated having to break with old associations, and to part from anything to which he had been long accustomed. When he moved to Enfield, in the autumn of 1827, he wrote to Hood that he had had "no health" at Islington, and having found benefit from previous visits at Enfield, was going to make his abode there altogether. But, he adds, "'twas with some pain we were evulsed from Colebrook. To change habitations is to die to them; and in my time I have died seven deaths. But I don't know whether such change does not bring with it a rejuvenescence. 'Tis an enterprise; and shoves back the sense of death's approximating, which though not terrible to me, is at all times particularly distasteful." The letter ends in a more cheerful vein, with news of ten pounds a year less rent than at Islington, and many anticipations of occasional trips to London "to breathe the fresher air of the metropolis," and of the curds and cream he and Mary would set before Hood and Jerdan and other London friends who might visit them in their country home. Some of these joys were to be realized, and there are many signs of the old humour and fancy not having been altogether banished by the separation from London interests and friends. Mrs. Shelley meets him in town in August, 1828, and writes to Leigh Hunt: "On my return to the Strand, I saw Lamb, who was very entertaining and amiable, though a little deaf. One of the first questions he asked me was, whether they made puns in Italy. I said 'Yes, now Hunt is there.' He said that Burney made a pun in Otaheite, the first that ever was made in that country. At first the na-

tives could not make out what he meant; but all at once they discovered the pun, and danced round him in transports of joy."

Lamb's work in literature was now substantially over, and he did little more than trifle with it, pleasantly and ingeniously, for the last few years. The *London Magazine*, after a long decay, and many changes of management, came to an end in 1826; and though some of Lamb's later contributions to the *New Monthly* and the *Englishman's Magazine* were included in the *Last Essays of Elia*, collected and published in 1833, *Elia* may be said to have been born, and to have died, with the *London Magazine*. In 1828 he wrote, at the request of the wife of Thomas Hood, who had lately lost a child, the well-known lines, *On an infant dying as soon as born*, redolent of the spirit and fancy of Ben Jonson and the later Elizabethans, and though written to order showing no lack of spontaneity. He continued to supply his young lady friends with acrostics and other such contributions to their albums. He suffered, as he alleged, terrible things from albums at this time. They were another of the taxes he found ruthlessly exacted from "retired leisure." He writes to Procter in 1829:

"We are in the last ages of the world, when St. Paul prophesied that women should be 'headstrong, lovers of their own wills, having albums.' I fled hither to escape the albumean persecution, and had not been in my new house twenty-four hours when the daughter of the next house came in with a friend's album to beg a contribution, and the following day intimated she had one of her own. Two more have sprung up since. If I take the wings of the morning, and fly unto the uttermost parts of the earth, there will albums be. New Holland has albums. But the age is to be complied with."

He so far complied with the age as to produce enough,



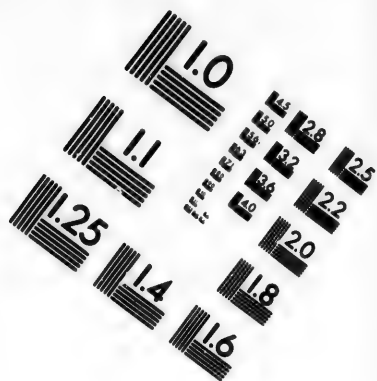
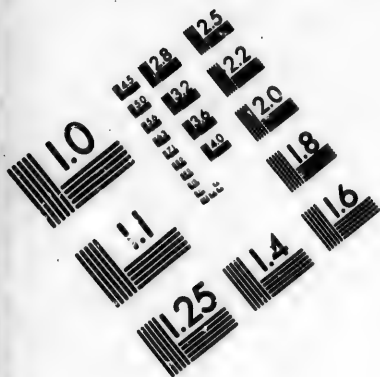
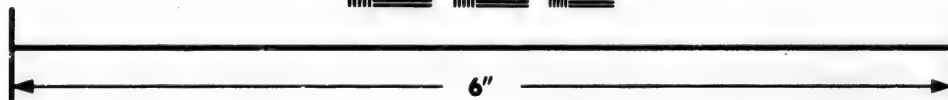
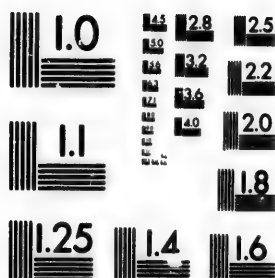


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with a few occasional verses of other kinds, to make a little volume for his friend Moxon, then newly starting as a publisher, to issue in appropriate shape, in 1830.

The "new house" spoken of in the letter just quoted was the Enfield house already mentioned; but in the summer of 1829 Charles and Mary Lamb again changed their home. The sister's illnesses were becoming more frequent and more protracted, and the cares of housekeeping weighed too heavily on her. Their old servant, Becky, had married and left them, and they were little contented with her successor. There is a gloomy letter of Charles to his constant correspondent Barton, in July of this year, telling how time was *not* lightening the difficulties of a man with no settled occupation. He had been paying a visit in London, but even London was not what it had been:

"The streets, the shops, are left, but all old friends are gone. . . . When I took leave of our adopted young friend at Charing Cross, 'twas heavy, unfeeling rain, and I had nowhere to go. Home have I none, and not a sympathizing house to turn to in the great city. Never did the waters of heaven pour down on a forlorn head. . . . I got home on Thursday, convinced that I was better to get home to my home at Enfield, and hide like a sick cat in my corner. And to make me more alone, our ill-tempered maid is gone, who, with all her airs, was yet a home-piece of furniture, a record of better days; the young thing that has succeeded her is good and attentive, but she is nothing. And I have no one here to talk over old matters with. . . . What I can do, and do over-do, is to walk; but deadly long are the days, these summer all-day days, with but a half-hour's candle-light and no fire-light. . . . I pity you for overwork, but I assure you no work is worse. The mind preys on itself—the most unwholesome food. I bragged formerly that I could not have too much time. I have a surfeit. With few years to come, the days are wearisome. But weariness is not eternal. Something will shine out to take the load off that flags me, which is at present intolerable. I have killed

an hour or two in this poor scrawl. I am a sanguinary murderer of time, and would kill him inch-meal just now. But the snake is vital. Well, I shall write merrier anon."

A letter of a week or two before had given sadder reasons for this depression of spirits. Mary Lamb had again been taken ill, and it had been necessary to remove her from home:

"I have been very desolate indeed. My loneliness is a little abated by our young friend Emma having just come here for her holidays, and a schoolfellow of hers that was with her. Still the house is not the same, though she is the same."

It was these repeated illnesses of his sister, and the loss of their old servant, that made them resolve to give up house-keeping, and take lodgings next door ("Forty-two inches nearer town," Lamb said), with an old couple, a Mr. and Mrs. Westwood, who undertook to board as well as lodge them. "We have both had much illness this year," he wrote to a friend, "and feeling infirmities and fretfulness grow upon us, we have cast off the cares of house-keeping, sold off our goods, and commenced boarding and lodging with a very comfortable old couple next door to where you found us. We use a sort of common table. Nevertheless, we have reserved a private one for an old friend." In less than a week he was able to report the good effect of the change upon Mary. "She looks two and a half years younger for it. But we have had sore trials."

The next year opens with a letter to Wordsworth describing the new *ménage*, and containing a charming picture of the old couple who now were host and hostess as well as landlords:

"Our providers are an honest pair, Dame Westwood and her husband; he, when the light of prosperity shined on them, a moderately thriving haberdasher within Bow Bells, retired since with something under a competence; writes himself parcel gentleman; hath borne parish offices; sings fine old sea-songs at threescore and ten; sighs only now and then when he thinks that he has a son on his hands about fifteen, whom he finds a difficulty in getting out into the world; and then checks a sigh with muttering, as I once heard him prettily, not meaning to be heard, 'I have married my daughter, however;' takes the weather as it comes; outsides it to town in severest season; and o' winter nights tells old stories not tending to literature (how comfortable to author-rid folks!), and has *one anecdote*, upon which and about forty pounds a year he seems to have retired in green old age."

The letter gives encouraging news of his sister's health and spirits, but the loneliness and the want of occupation are pressing heavily, he says, upon himself. He yearns for London and the cheerful streets. "Let no native Londoner imagine that health and rest, innocent occupation, interchange of converse sweet, and recreative study, can make the country anything better than altogether odious and detestable." Later, in March, his thoughts are diverted from his own condition by the illness of Miss Isola; and a proposal from John Murray to continue the *Specimens of the Old Dramatists* is declined, because in his anxiety for their young protégée he could think of nothing else. Miss Isola happily recovered. Lamb fetched her from Suffolk, where the illness had occurred, to Enfield, and it was on the journey home that the famous stage-coach incident occurred. "We travelled with one of those troublesome fellow-passengers in a stage coach that is called a well-informed man. For twenty miles we discoursed about the properties of steam, probabilities of carriage by ditto, till all my science, and more than all, was exhausted, and I was thinking of escaping my torment by getting up

on the outside, when, getting into Bishop Stortford, my gentleman, spying some farming land, put an unlucky question to me: 'What sort of crop of turnips I thought we should have this year?' Emma's eyes turned to me, to know what in the world I could have to say; and she burst into a violent fit of laughter, maugre her pale serious cheeks, when with the greatest gravity I replied that 'It depended, I believed, upon boiled legs of mutton.'

There is little to record of incident or change in these last years of the life, now more and more lonely, of brother and sister. A small volume of occasional poetry, *Album Verses*—the amusements of the latter years of leisure—was produced by Mr. Moxon in 1830, but contains little to call for remark; and another venture of Mr. Moxon's, *The Englishman's Magazine*, in the following year, drew from Lamb some prose contributions, under the heading of *Peter's Net*. In 1833, the Lambs made their last change of residence. Their furniture had been disposed of when they settled at Enfield, and they now entered on an arrangement similar to the last, of boarding and lodging with another married pair—younger, however, and more active—a Mr. and Mrs. Walden, of Bay Cottage, in the neighbouring parish of Edmonton. The reasons for the change are of the old sad kind. A letter to Wordsworth, of May, 1833, tells the melancholy story: "Mary is ill again. Her illnesses encroach yearly. The last was three months, followed by two of depression most dreadful. I look back upon her earlier attacks with longing. Nice little durations of six weeks or so, followed by complete restoration, shocking as they were to me then. In short, half her life is dead to me, and the other half is made anxious with fears and lookings forward to the next shock." Mary Lamb had been on for-

mer occasions of illness under the care of the Waldens, and the increasing frequency of her attacks made this change necessary in the interest of both brother and sister. It secured for Mary the constant supervision of an attendant.

The same letter tells of an additional element of loneliness that was in store for them. Emma Isola was engaged "with my perfect approval and entire concurrence" to Mr. Moxon, the publisher, and the wedding was fixed. Lamb writes of it with the old habitual unselfishness, though it was to leave him without his "only walk-companion, whose mirthful spirits were the 'youth of our house.'" He turns, after his manner, to think of his compensations. He is emancipated from Enfield, with attentive people and younger, and what is more, is three or four miles nearer to his beloved town. Miss Isola was married on the 30th of July, and it is pleasant to know that though up to the very day of the wedding Mary Lamb had been unable to interest herself in the event, and was of course unable to be present at the ceremony, she attributes her recovery from this attack to the stimulus of the good news suddenly communicated. There is a pathetic note of congratulation from her to the newly-married pair, in which she tells them of this with characteristic simplicity. The Waldens had with happy tact proposed Mr. and Mrs. Moxon's-health, at their quiet meal. "It restored me from that moment," writes Mary Lamb, "as if by an electrical stroke, to the entire possession of my senses. I never felt so calm and quiet after a similar illness as I do now. I feel as if all tears were wiped from my eyes, and all care from my heart." And Charles is able to add, in a postscript, how they are again happy in their old pursuits—cards, walks, and reading: "never was such a calm, or such a recovery."

In this year 1833 the later essays of Lamb contributed to the *London Magazine*, together with some shorter pieces from other periodicals, were published by Mr. Moxon, under the title of the *Last Essays of Elia*, and with this event the literary life of Lamb was destined to close. Nothing more, beyond an occasional copy of verses for a friend, came from his pen. Notwithstanding the increasing illness of his sister, he was able to enjoy some cheerful society, notably with a friend of recent date, Mr. Cary, the translator of *Dante*, with whom he dined periodically at the British Museum. Mr. John Forster, afterwards to be known widely as the author of the *Life of Goldsmith*, was another accession to his list of congenial friends. But these could not make compensation for the loss of the old. Lamb was not yet sixty years of age, but he was without those ties and relationships which more than all else we know bring "forward-looking thoughts." His life was lived chiefly in the past, and one by one "the old familiar faces" were passing away. In July, 1834, Coleridge died, after many months of suffering. For the last eighteen years of his life he had resided beneath Mr. Gillman's roof at Highgate, and Charles and Mary Lamb were among the most welcome visitors at the house: and now the friendship of fifty years was at an end. All the little asperities of early rivalry; all the natural regrets at sight of a life so wasted—powers so vast ending in performance so inadequate—a spirit so willing, and a will so weak—were forgotten now. Lamb had never spared the foibles of his old companion; when Coleridge had soared to his highest metaphysical flights he had apologized for him—"Yes! you know Coleridge is so full of his fun;"—he had described him as an "archangel, a little damaged;"—but the indescribable moral afflatus felt

through Coleridge's obscurest rhapsodies had been among the best influences on Charles Lamb's life. A few months later he tried to put his regrets and his obligations into words. "When I heard of the death of Coleridge, it was without grief. It seemed to me that he had long been on the confines of the next world—that he had a hunger for eternity. I grieved then that I could not grieve; but since, I feel how great a part he was of me. His great and dear spirit haunts me. I cannot think a thought, I cannot make a criticism on men or books, without an ineffectual turning and reference to him. He was the proof and touchstone of all my cogitations."

The death of his friend was Charles Lamb's death-blow. There had been two persons in the world for whom he would have wished to live—Coleridge and his sister Mary. The latter was now for the greater part of each year worse than dead to him. The former was gone, and the blank left him helplessly alone. In conversation with friends he would suddenly exclaim, as if with surprise that aught else in the world should interest him, "Coleridge is dead!" And within five weeks of the day when the touching tribute just cited was committed to paper, he was called to join his friend. One day in the middle of December, as he was taking his usual walk along the London road, his foot struck against a stone, and he stumbled and fell, inflicting a slight wound on his face. For some days the injury appeared trifling, and on the 22nd of the month he writes a cheerful note to the wife of his old friend George Dyer, concerning the safety of a certain book belonging to Mr. Cary, which he had left at her house. On the same day, however, symptoms of erysipelas supervened, and it soon became evident that his general health was too feeble to resist the attack. From

the first appearance of the disease the failure of life was so rapid that his intimate friends, Talfourd and Crabb Robinson, did not reach his bedside in time for him to recognize them. The few words that escaped his lips while his mind was still unclouded conveyed to those who watched him that he was undisturbed at the prospect of death. His sister was, happily for herself, in no state to feel or appreciate the blow that was falling. On the 27th of December, murmuring in his last moments the names of his dearest friends, he passed tranquilly out of life. "On the following Saturday his remains were laid in a deep grave in Edmonton church-yard, made in a spot which, about a fortnight before, he had pointed out to his sister, on an afternoon wintry walk, as the place where he wished to be buried."

There is a touching fitness in the circumstance that Charles Lamb could not longer survive his earliest and dearest friend—that, trying it for a little while, "he liked it not—and died." It was a fitting comment on the circumstance, that that other great poet and thinker who next to Coleridge shared Lamb's deepest pride and affection, as he looked back a year afterwards on the gaps that death had made in the ranks of those he loved, should have once more linked their names in imperishable verse:

"Nor has the rolling year twice measured
From sign to sign its steadfast course,
Since every mortal power of Coleridge
Was frozen at its marvellous source.

"The rapt one of the godlike forehead,
The heaven-eyed creature, sleeps in earth:
And Lamb, the frolic and the gentle,
Has vanished from his lonely hearth."

The friends of Lamb were not slow in giving expression to their sorrow for his loss, and their admiration of his character—Wordsworth and Landor in verse, Procter, Moxon, Forster, and many others through various channels, in prose. For the most part they had to deal in generalities, for Mary Lamb still lived, and the full extent of her brother's devotion and sacrifice could not yet be told. But abundant testimony was forthcoming that (to borrow Landor's words) he had left behind him that "worthier thing than tears,"

"The love of friends, without a single foe."

Wordsworth, in a beautiful tribute to his friend, begun with some view to an inscription for his grave, expressed no more than the verdict of all who knew him well, when he wrote,

"Oh, he was good, if ever good man was."

And yet there must have been many of his old acquaintances who were startled at finding admiration for him thus expressed. Those who were not aware of the conditions of his life, or knew him only on his ordinary convivial side, regarded him, we are assured, as a flippant talker, reckless indeed in speech, moody, and of uncertain temper. Few could know what Coleridge and Wordsworth and Southey knew so well, that with all his boastful renunciation of orthodoxy in belief, and his freedom of criticism on religious matters, he was one capable of feeling keenly both the sentiment and the principle of religious trust. There is ample evidence of this in those early letters written in the darkest hours of his life. And though the sentiment waned as a different class of associates gathered round him, and there were few at hand with whom to interchange his deeper thoughts, religion in him never died,

but became a habit—a habit of enduring hardness, and cleaving to the steadfast performance of duty in face of the strongest allurements to the pleasanter and easier course. He set himself a task, one of the saddest and hardest that can be undertaken, to act as guardian and companion to one living always on the brink of insanity. For eight-and-thirty years he was faithful to this purpose, giving up everything for it, and never thinking that he had done enough, or could do enough, for his early friend, his “guardian angel.”

It is noteworthy that those surface qualities of Charles Lamb, by which so many were content to judge him, were just those which men are slow to connect with sterling goodness such as this. There was a certain Bohemianism in him, it must be allowed—a fondness for overmuch tobacco and gin-and-water, and for the company of those whom more particular people looked shy upon. He often fretted against the loss of time they caused him, but he was tolerant for the moment of what fed his sense of humour or fancy, and always of that which touched the “virtue of compassion” in him. He was free of speech, and not in the least afraid of shocking his company. And it seems a natural inference that such traits betoken a hand-to-mouth existence, a certain want of moral backbone, irregularity in money matters, and the absence of any settled purpose. Yet it was for the opposite of all this that Lamb’s life is so notable. He was well versed in poverty—for some years in marked degree—but he seems never to have exceeded his income, or to have been in debt. In the days of his most straitened means he was never so poor but that he had in reserve something to help those poorer than himself. His letters show this throughout; and as his own fortunes mended, his generosity in giving

becomes truly surprising. "He gave away *greatly*," says his friend Mr. Procter, and goes on to relate how on one occasion when he was in low spirits, and Lamb imagined that it might proceed from pecuniary causes, he said, suddenly, "My dear boy, I have a quantity of useless things—I have now in my desk a—a hundred pounds—that I don't *know* what to do with. Take it." In his more prosperous days he always had pensioners on his bounty. For many years he allowed his old school-mistress thirty pounds a year. To a friend of Southey's, who was paralyzed, he paid ten pounds yearly; and when a subscription was raised for Godwin in his gravest difficulties, Lamb's contribution was the munificent one of fifty pounds. His letters, too, prove that he could always make the more difficult sacrifices of time and thought when others were in need. For a young lady establishing a school—for a poor fellow seeking an occasional clerkship in the India House—for such as these he is continually pleading and taking trouble. And before he knew that the directors of the India House intended to provide for his sister, in the event of her surviving him, on the footing of a wife, he had managed to put by a sufficient sum to place her beyond the reach of want. At his death he left a sum of two thousand pounds, for his sister during her life, with a reversion to the child of their adoption, Emma Isola, then Mrs. Moxon.

Mary Lamb survived her brother nearly thirteen years, dying at the advanced age of 82, on the 20th of May, 1847. After the death of Charles, her health rallied sufficiently for her to visit occasionally among their old friends; but as years passed, her attacks became still more frequent, and of longer duration, till her mind became permanently enfeebled. After leaving Edmonton,

she lived chiefly at St. John's Wood, under the care of a nurse. Her pension, together with the income from her brother's savings, was amply sufficient for her few needs.

"She will live for ever in the memory of her friends," writes that true and faithful friend, Crabb Robinson, "as one of the most amiable and admirable of women." From this verdict there is no dissentient voice. With much less from which to form a direct opinion than in her brother's case, we seem to read her character almost equally well. The tributes of her brother scattered through essay and letter, her own few but very significant letters, and her contributions to literature, show her strong and healthy common-sense, her true womanliness, and her gift of keen and active sympathy. She shared with Charles a love of Quaker-like colour and homeliness in dress. "She wore a neat cap," Mr. Procter tells us, "of the fashion of her youth; an old-fashioned dress. Her face was pale and somewhat square, but very placid, with grey intelligent eyes. She was very mild in her manners to strangers; and to her brother, gentle and tender, always. She had often an upward look of peculiar meaning when directed towards him, as though to give him assurance that all was then well with her." This unvarying manner, betokening mutual dependence and interest, was the feature that most impressed all who watched them together, her eyes often fixed on his as on "some adoring disciple," and ever listening to help his speech in some difficult word, and to anticipate the coming need. He in turn was always on the watch to detect any sign in her face of failing health or spirits, and to divert the conversation, if occasion arose, from any topic that might distress her or set up some dangerous excitement. Among the strange and motley guests that their hospitality brought around them, her own

opinions and habits remained, with little danger of being shaken. "It has been the lot of my cousin," writes Lamb in the essay *Mackery End*, "oftener perhaps than I could have wished, to have had for her associates, and mine, free thinkers, leaders and disciples of novel philosophies and systems; but she neither wrangles with, nor accepts their opinions. That which was good and venerable to her when she was a child, retains its authority over her mind still. She never juggles or plays tricks with her understanding." It was this element of quietism in Mary Lamb that made her so inestimable a companion for her brother. She was strong where he was weak, and reposeful where he was so often ill at ease.

She was indeed fitted in all respects to be Charles Lamb's life-long companion. She shared his worthiest tastes, to the full. More catholic in her partialities than he, she devoured modern books as well as ancient with unfailling appetite, and had formed out of her reading a pure and idiomatic English style, with just a touch, as in everything else belonging to her, of an old-world formality. She possessed a distinct gift of humour, as her portion of *Mrs. Leicester's School* amply shows. The story of the *Father's Wedding-day* has strokes of humour and observation not unworthy of Goldsmith. Landor used to rave, with characteristic vehemence, about this little sketch, and to declare that the incident of the child wishing, when dressed in her new frock, that her poor "mamma was alive, to see how fine she was on papa's wedding-day," was a masterpiece. The story called *The Young Mahometan* has a special interest as containing yet one more recollection of the old house at Blakesware. The medallions of the Twelve Cæsars, the Hogarth prints, and the tapestry hangings, are all there, together with that

picturesque incident, which Charles elsewhere has not overlooked, of the broken battledore and shuttlecock, telling of happy children's voices that had once echoed through the lonely chambers. It is certain that Charles and Mary, ardently as they both clung in after years to London sights and sounds, owed much both in genius and character to having breathed the purer, calmer air of rural homesteads.

A common education, whether that of sweet garden scenes, or the choice fancies and meditations of poet and moralist—a sense of mutual need—a profound pity for each other's frailties—of these was forged the bond that held them, and years of suffering and self-denial had made it ever more and more strong. "That we had much to struggle with, as we grew up together, we have reason to be most thankful. It strengthened and knit our compact closer. We could never have been what we have been to each other, if we had always had the sufficiency which you now complain of." It is with these words of divine philosophy that, when comparative ease had at last been achieved, Charles Lamb could look back upon the anxious past.

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CHAPTER IX.

LAMB'S PLACE AS A CRITIC.

It remains to speak of those prose writings of Lamb, many of earlier date than the *Essays of Elia*, by which his quality as a critic must be determined. As early as 1811 he had published in Leigh Hunt's *Reflector* his essay on *The Genius and Character of Hogarth*. This was no subject taken up for the occasion. "His graphic representations," says Lamb, "are indeed books: they have the teeming, fruitful, suggestive meaning of words"—and no book was more familiar to him. A set of Hogarth's prints, including the *Harlot's* and *Rake's Progresses*, had been among the treasures of the old house at Blakesware; and Lamb as a child had spelled through their grim and ghastly histories again and again, till he came to know every figure and incident in them by heart. And now the cavalier tone in which certain leaders of the classical and historical schools of painting were wont to dismiss Hogarth as of slight value in point of art, made him keen to vindicate his old favourite. He has scant patience with those who noted defective drawing or "knowledge of the figure" in the artist. He is intolerant altogether of technical criticism. The essay is devoted to showing how true a moralist the painter is, and how false the view which would regard him chiefly as a humourist. He is a great satirist—a

Juvenal or a Persius. Moreover, he is a combination of satirist and dramatist. Hogarth had claimed for his pictures that they should be judged as successive scenes in a play, and Lamb takes him at his word. He is carried away by admiration for the tragic power displayed. He is in ecstasies over the print of *Gin Lane*, certainly one of the poorest of Hogarth's pictures as a composition, losing its due effect by overcrowding of incident, and made grotesque through sheer exaggeration. Yet, what stirs the critic's heart is "the pity of it," and he is in no humour to admit other considerations. He calls it "a sublime print." "Every part is full of strange images of death; it is perfectly amazing and astounding to look at;" and so forth. It is noticeable that Lamb does not write with the pictures before him, and trusts to a memory not quite trustworthy. For example, to prove that Hogarth is not merely repulsive, that there is always a sweet humanity in reserve as a foil for the horrors he deals with—something to "keep the general air from tainting," he says: "Take the mild, supplicating posture of patient poverty, in the poor woman that is persuading the pawnbroker to accept her clothes in pledge in the plate of *Gin Lane*." There is really no such incident in the picture. There is a woman offering in pawn her kettle and fire-irons; but, taken in combination with all the other incidents of the scene, she is certainly pledging them to buy gin. Here, as elsewhere, Lamb damages his case by over-statement, partly through love of surprises, partly because he willingly discovered in poem or picture what he wished to find there. He sees more of humanity and sweetness in what affects him than is actually present. He *reads* something of himself into the composition he is reviewing. He is on safer ground when he dwells on the genuine power, the pity and the

terror, in that last scene but one of *The Marriage-à-la-Mode*; and on the gentleness of the wife's countenance, poetizing the whole scene, in the print of *The Distressed Poet*. And he is doing a service to art of larger scope than fixing the respective ranks of Hogarth and Poussin, in these noble concluding lines:

"I say not that all the ridiculous subjects of Hogarth have necessarily something in them to make us like them; some are indifferent to us, some in their natures repulsive, and only made interesting by the wonderful skill and truth to nature in the painter; but I contend that there is in most of them that sprinkling of the better nature which, like holy water, chases away and disperses the contagion of the bad. They have this in them besides, that they bring us acquainted with the every-day human face; they give us skill to detect those gradations of sense and virtue (which escape the careless or fastidious observer) in the countenances of the world about us; and prevent that disgust at common life, that *tedium quotidianarum formarum*, which an unrestricted passion for ideal forms and beauties is in danger of producing."

His judgments of pictures are, as might be expected, those of a man of letters, not of a painter. It is the *story* in the picture that impresses him, and the technical qualities leave him unmoved. A curious instance of this is afforded in his essay on *The Barrenness of the Imaginative Faculty in the Productions of Modern Art*. After complaining that, with the exception of Hogarth, no artist within the last fifty years had treated a story *imaginatively*—"upon whom his subject has so acted that it has seemed to direct *him*, not to be arranged by him"—he breaks out into a fine rhapsody on the famous *Bacchus and Ariadne* of Titian in the National Gallery. But it is not as a masterpiece of colour and drawing that it excites his admiration. The qualities of the poet, not those of

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the painter, are what he discovers in it. It is the "imaginative faculty" which he detects, as shown in the power of uniting the past and the present. "Precipitous, with his reeling satyr-rout around him, re-peopleing and re-illuming suddenly the waste places, drunk with a new fury beyond the grape, Bacchus, born of fire, fire-like flings himself at the Cretan:" this is the *present*. Ariadne, "unconscious of Bacchus, or but idly casting her eyes as upon some unconcerning pageant, her soul undistracted from Theseus"—Ariadne, "pacing the solitary shore in as much heart-silence, and in almost the same local solitude, with which she awoke at daybreak to catch the forlorn last glances of the sail that bore away the Athenian:" this is the *past*. But it is in the situation itself, not in Titian's treatment of it, that Lamb has found the antithesis that so delights him. He is in fact the poet, taking the subject out of the painter's hands, and treating it afresh. Lamb obtains an easy victory for the ancients over the moderns, by choosing as his foil for Titian and Raffaele the treatment of sacred subjects by Martin, the painter of *Belshazzar's Feast* and *The Plains of Heaven*. And it is significant of a certain inability in Lamb to do full justice to his contemporaries, that in noting the barrenness of the fifty years in question in the matter of art, he has no exception to make but Hogarth. He might have had a word to say for Turner and Wilkie.

The essay on *The Artificial Comedy of the Last Century* has received more attention than its importance at all warrants, from the circumstance that Macaulay set to work seriously to demolish its reasoning, in reviewing Leigh Hunt's edition of the Restoration Dramatists. Lamb's essay was originally part of a larger essay upon the old actors, in which he was led to speak of the comedies of

Congreve and Wycherley, and the reasons why they no longer held the stage. His line of defence is well known. He protests that the world in which their characters move is so wholly artificial—a conventional world, quite apart from that of real life—that it is beside the mark to judge them by any moral standard. "They are a world of themselves almost as much as fairy-land." The apology is really (as Hartley Coleridge acutely points out) for those who, like himself, could enjoy the wit of these writers, without finding their actual judgment of moral questions at all influenced by it. It must be admitted that Lamb does not convince us of the sincerity of his reasoning, and probably he did not convince himself. He loved paradox; and he loved, moreover, to find some soul of goodness in things evil. As Hartley Coleridge adds, it was his way always to take hold of things "by the better handle."

The same love of paradox is manifest in the essay on *Shakspeare's Tragedies*, "considered with reference to their fitness for stage representation." If there are any positions which we should *not* expect to find Lamb disputing, they are the acting qualities of Shakspeare's plays, and the intellectual side of the actor's art. Yet these are what he devotes this paper to impugning. He had been much disgusted by the fulsome flattery contained in the epitaph on Garrick in Westminster Abbey. In this bombastic effusion, this "farrago of false thoughts and nonsense," as Lamb calls it, Garrick is put on a level with Shakspeare:

"And till Eternity with power sublime
Shall mark the mortal hour of hoary Time,
Shakspeare and Garrick like twin-stars shall shine,
And earth irradiate with a beam divine."

Why is it, asks Lamb, that "from the days of the actor here celebrated to our own, it should have been the fashion to compliment every performer in his turn, that has had the luck to please the town in any of the great characters of Shakspeare, with the notion of possessing *a mind congenial with the poet's*: how people should come thus unaccountably to confound the power of originating poetical images and conceptions with the faculty of being able to read or recite the same when put into words?" And he goes on, in the same strain of contempt, to speak of the "low tricks upon the eye and ear," which the player can so easily compass, as contrasted with the "absolute mastery over the heart and soul of man, which a great dramatic poet possesses." No one knew better than Lamb, that the resources of the actor's art are not fairly or adequately stated in such language as this. He had himself the keenest relish for good acting, and no one has described and criticised it more finely. Witness his description of his favourite Munden, in the part of the Greenwich Pensioner, Old Dosey, and of Bensley's conception of the character of Malvolio. Or, again, take the exquisite passage in which he recalls Mrs. Jordan's performance of Viola: "There is no giving an account how she delivered the disguised story of her love for Orsino. It was no set speech, that she had foreseen, so as to weave it into a harmonious period, line necessarily following line to make up the music—yet I have heard it so spoken, or rather *read*, not without its grace and beauty; but when she had declared her sister's history to be a 'blank,' and that she 'never told her love,' there was a pause, as if the story had ended—and then the image of the 'worm in the bud' came up as a new suggestion—and the heightened image of 'Patience' still followed after that, as by some

growing (and not mechanical) process, thought springing up after thought, I would almost say, as they were watered by her tears." We are quite sure that the writer of these eloquent words did not seriously regard the art of acting as a mere succession of tricks "upon the eye and ear." He was for the moment prejudiced against the great actor—whom, by the way, he had never seen, Garrick having left the stage in 1776—by the injudicious language of his flatterers. But if we make due allowance for his outburst of spleen, we shall find much that is admirably true mixed up with it. Critics have often, for instance, insisted upon what is gained by seeing a drama acted, as distinguished from reading it, and Lamb here devotes himself to showing how far it is from being all gain. "It is difficult for a frequent playgoer to disembarass the idea of Hamlet from the person and voice of Mr. Kemble. We speak of Lady Macbeth, while we are in reality thinking of Mrs. Siddons." We get distinctness, says Lamb, from seeing a character thus embodied, but "dearly do we pay" for this sense of distinctness.

This line of criticism leads up to the crowning paradox of this essay, that the plays of Shakspeare "are less calculated for performance on a stage than those of almost any other dramatist whatever." Here again it may be said that no one knew better than Lamb that in a most important sense these words are the very reverse of truth. There is no quality in which Shakspeare's greatness as a dramatist is more conspicuous than his knowledge of what is effective in stage representation. But Lamb chose to mean something very different from this. He was thinking of certain other qualities in the poet which are incommunicable by the medium of acting, and on these he proceeds to dwell, discussing for that purpose the traditional

stage rendering of Hamlet and other characters. He points out how the stage Hamlet almost always overdoes his scorn for Polonius, and his brutality to Ophelia, and asks the reason of this. It does not seem to occur to him that this is simply *bad* acting, and that it is not at all a necessary incident of the art that Hamlet's feelings should be thus represented. He seems to be confounding the limitations of the particular actor with those of his art. Indeed, it is clear that many of the positions maintained in this paper are simply convenient opportunities for enlarging upon some character or conception of the great dramatist.

Lamb had a juster complaint against Garrick than that supplied by the words of a foolish epitaph. He boldly expresses a doubt whether the actor was capable of any real admiration for Shakspeare. Would any true lover of his plays, he asks, have "admitted into his matchless scenes such ribald trash" as Tate and Cibber and the rest had foisted into the acting versions of the dramas? Much of the scorn and indignation expressed by Lamb in this paper becomes intelligible when we recall in what garbled shapes the dramatist was presented. Garrick himself had taken a prominent share in these alterations of the text. It was he who completely changed the last act of *Hamlet*, and turned the *Winter's Tale* into a piece of Arcadian insipidity. But the greatest outrage of all, in Lamb's view, would be Tate's version of *Lear*—in a modified edition of which Garrick himself had performed. In this version—which the editor of Bell's acting edition (1774) calls a "judicious blending" of Shakspeare and Tate—the character of the Fool is altogether omitted; Cordelia survives, and marries Edgar; and Lear, Kent, and Gloster announce their intention of retiring into private life, to watch the

happiness of the young couple, Lear himself bringing down the curtain with these amazing lines :

"Thou, Kent, and I, retired from noise and strife,
Will calmly pass our short reserves of time
In cool reflections on our fortunes past,
Cheered with relation of the prosperous reign
Of this celestial pair ; thus our remains
Shall in an even course of thoughts be past,
Enjoy the present hour, nor fear the last."

This was the stuff which in Lamb's day the actors and their audience were content to accept as the work of the Master-hand. It may well account for a tone of bitterness, and even of exaggeration, that pervades the essay. It is some compensation that it drew from Lamb his noble vindication of Shakspeare's original. The passage is well known, but I cannot deny myself the pleasure of quoting it once again :

"The Lear of Shakspeare cannot be acted. The contemptible machinery by which they mimic the storm which he goes out in, is not more inadequate to represent the horrors of the real elements, than any actor can be to represent Lear ; they might more easily propose to personate the Satan of Milton upon a stage, or one of Michael Angelo's terrible figures. The greatness of Lear is not in corporal dimension, but in intellectual ; the explosions of his passion are terrible as a volcano ; they are storms turning up and disclosing to the bottom that sea, his mind, with all its vast riches. It is his mind which is laid bare. This case of flesh and blood seems too insignificant to be thought on : even as he himself neglects it. On the stage we see nothing but corporal infirmities and weakness, the impotence of rage : while we read it, we see not Lear, but we *are* Lear, we are in his mind, we are sustained by a grandeur which baffles the malice of daughters and storms ; in the aberrations of his reason we discover a mighty irregular power of reasoning, immethodized from the ordinary purposes of life, but exerting its powers, as the wind blows

where it listeth, at will upon the corruptions and abuses of mankind. What have looks or tones to do with that sublime identification of his age with that of the *heavens themselves*, when, in his reproaches to them for conniving at the injustice of his children, he reminds them that 'they themselves are old?' What gestures shall we appropriate to this? What has the voice or the eye to do with such things? But the play is beyond all art, as the tamperings with it show: it is too hard and stony; it must have love-scenes, and a happy ending. It is not enough that Cordelia is a daughter; she must shine as a lover too. Tate has put his hook in the nostrils of this Leviathan, for Garrick and his followers, the showmen of the scene, to draw the mighty beast about more easily. A happy ending!—as if the living martyrdom that Lear had gone through, the flaying of his feelings alive, did not make a fair dismissal from the stage of life the only decorous thing for him. If he is to live and be happy after, if he could sustain this world's burden after, why all this pudder and preparation—why torment us with all this unnecessary sympathy? as if the childish pleasure of getting his gilt robes and sceptre again could tempt him to act over again his misused station—as if, at his years, and with his experience, anything was left but to die."

No passage in Lamb's writings is better fitted than this to illustrate his peculiar power as a commentator. It as little suggests Hazlitt or Coleridge, as it does Schlegel or Gervinus. It is more remote still—it need hardly be added—from the fantastic tricks of a later day, which are doing all they can to make Shakspearian criticism hideous. Lamb's emphatic vindication of the course of events in Shakspeare's tragedy of course implies a criticism and a commendation of the dramatist. But no one feels that he is either patronizing or judging Shakspeare. He takes Lear, as it were, out of the hands of literature, and regards him as a human being placed in the world where all men have to suffer and be tempted. We forget that he is a character in a play, or even in history. Lamb's criticism is a commentary on life, and no truer homage

could be paid to the dramatist than that he should be allowed for the time to pass out of our thoughts.

Thoroughly characteristic of Lamb is the admirable paper on *The Sanity of True Genius*, suggested by Dryden's famous line as to "great wit" being nearly allied to madness. It aims to disprove this, and to show that, on the contrary, the greatest wits "will ever be found to be the sanest writers." He illustrates this by the use that Shakspeare and others make of the supernatural persons and situations in their writings. "Caliban, the Witches, are as true to the laws of their own nature (ours with a difference) as Othello, Hamlet, and Macbeth. Herein the great and the little wits are differenced: that if the latter wander ever so little from nature or actual existence, they lose themselves and their readers." And with a marvelous semblance of paradox, which yet is felt to be profoundly true, he proceeds to declare that in Spenser's episode of the "Cave of Mammon," where the Money-God, and his daughter Ambition, and Pilate washing his hands—the most discordant persons and situations—are introduced, the controlling power of the poet's sanity makes the whole more actually consistent than the characters and situations of every-day life in the latest novel from the Minerva Press. It is a proof, he says, "of that hidden sanity which still guides the poet in his wildest seeming aberrations." No detached sentences can, however, convey an idea of this splendid argument. Nothing that Lamb has written proves more decisively how large a part the higher imagination plays in true criticism; nothing better illustrates the truth of Butler's claim, that

"The poet must be tried by his peers,
And not by pedants and philosophers."

That Lamb was a poet is at the root of his greatness as a critic; and his own judgments of poetry show the same sanity to which he points in his poetical brethren. He is never so impulsive or discursive that he fails to show how unerring is his judgment on all points connected with the poet's art. There had been those before Lamb, for example, who had quoted and called attention to the poetry of George Wither; but no one had thought of noticing that his metre was also that of Ambrose Philips, and that Pope and his friends had only proved their own defective ear by seeking to make it ridiculous. "To the measure in which these lines are written, the wits of Queen Anne's days contemptuously gave the name of Namby-Pamby, in ridicule of Ambrose Philips; who has used it in some instances, as in the lines on Cuzzoni, to my feeling at least very deliciously; but Wither, whose darling measure it seems to have been, may show that in skilful hands it is capable of expressing the subtlest movement of passion. So true it is, what Drayton seems to have felt, that it is the poet who modifies the metre, not the metre the poet."

It was in the margin of a copy of Wither's poems that this exquisite comment was originally made; and in such a casual way did much of Lamb's finest criticism come into being. All through his life, in letter and essay, he was making remarks of this kind, throwing them out by the way, never thinking that they would be hereafter treasured up as the most luminous and penetrative judgments of the century. And it may well be asked why, with such a range of sympathy, from Marlowe to Ambrose Philips, from Sir T. Browne to Sir William Temple, he was so limited, so one-sided in his estimate of the literature of his own age? It is true that he was among the

first in England to appreciate Burns and Wordsworth. But to Scott, Byron, and Shelley he entertained a feeling almost of aversion. He was glad (as we gather from the essay on *The Sanity of True Genius*) that "a happier genius" had arisen to expel the "innutritious phantoms" of the Minerva Press; but the success of the Waverley Novels seems to have caused him amusement rather than any other feeling. About Byron he wrote to Joseph Cottle: "I have a thorough aversion to his character, and a very moderate admiration of his genius: he is great in so little a way. To be a poet is to be the man, not a petty portion of occasional low passion worked up in a permanent form of humanity." Shelley's poetry, he told Barton, he did not understand, and that it was "thin sown with profit or delight." When he read Goethe's *Faust* (of course in an English version), he at once pronounced it inferior to Marlowe's in the chief *motive* of the plot, and was evidently content to let criticism end there. Something of this may be ascribed to a jealousy in Lamb—a strange and needless jealousy for his own loved writers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and a fear lest the new comers should usurp some of the praise and renown that he claimed for them; something, also, to a perverseness in him which made him like to be in opposition to the current opinion, whatever it might be. He was often unwilling, rather than unable, to discuss the claims of a new candidate for public favour. He lived mainly in communion with an older literature. It was to him inexhaustible in amount and in excellence, and he was impatient of what sought to divert his attention from it. It was literally true of him that "when a new book came out—he read an old one."

But even of the old ones, the classics of our literature,

it was not easy to say what his opinion in any case would be. For instance, he was a great admirer of Smollett, and was with great difficulty brought to admit the superiority of Fielding. And in the work of a greater humourist than Smollett, in the Picaresque school—*Gil Blas*—he would not acknowledge any merit at all. The truth is that for Lamb to enjoy a work of humour, it must embody a strong human interest, or at least have a pulse of humanity throbbing through it. Humour, without pity or tenderness, only repelled him. It was another phase of the same quality in him that—as we have seen in his estimate of Byron—where he was not drawn to the *man*, he was almost disabled from admiring, or even understanding, the man's work. Had he ever come face to face with the author for a single evening, the result might have been quite different.

There is no difficulty, therefore, in detecting the limitations of Lamb as a critic. In a most remarkable degree he had the defects of his qualities. Where his heart was, there his judgment was sound. Where he actively disliked, or was passively indifferent, his critical powers remained dormant. He was too fond of paradox, too much at the mercy of his emotions or the mood of the hour, to be a safe guide always. But where no disturbing forces interfered, he exercised a faculty almost unique in the history of criticism. When Southey heard of his *Specimens of the English Dramatic Poets*, he wrote to Coleridge: "If co-operative labour were as practicable as it is desirable, what a history of English literature might he and you and I set forth!" Such an enterprise would be, as Southey saw, all but impossible; but if the spiritual insight of Coleridge, and the unwearied industry and sober common-sense of Southey, could be combined with

the special genius of Charles Lamb, something like the ideal commentary on English literature might be the result.

As it is, Lamb's contribution to that end is of the rarest value. If it is too much to say that he singly revived the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, it is because we see clearly that that revival was coming, and would have come even without his help. But he did more than recall attention to certain forgotten writers. He flashed a light from himself upon them, not only heightening every charm and deepening every truth, but making even their eccentricities beautiful and lovable. And in doing this he has linked his name for ever with theirs. When we think of "the sweetest names, and which carry a perfume in the mention—Kit Marlowe, Drayton, Drummond of Hawthornden, and Cowley"—then the thought of Charles Lamb will never be far off. His name, too, has a perfume in the mention. "There are some reputations," wrote Southey to Caroline Bowles, "which will not keep, but Lamb's is not of that kind. His memory will retain its fragrance as long as the best spice that ever was expended upon one of the Pharaohs."

THE END.

MAP. IX.

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DE QUINCEY

BY

DAVID MASSON

PREFATORY NOTE.

FOR matters of fact in the following pages the chief authorities are the collective edition of De Quincey's works, in sixteen volumes, published by Messrs. A. & C. Black, of Edinburgh, and the Life of De Quincey, in two volumes, by Mr. H. A. Page (London, John Hogg & Co., 1877). This last, the only extensive and complete Life of De Quincey in the language, contains a large quantity of biographical information supplied to Mr. Page by the family of De Quincey, and by friends and correspondents of his, much of it in the form of interesting letters and papers never before made public. Such information had long been desired in vain; and till the appearance of Mr. Page's work little more was known about De Quincey's life than had been revealed by himself in the autobiographical portions of his writings. While, however, Mr. Page's work and those autobiographical writings of De Quincey have been the main authorities for facts and dates, there have been miscellaneous gleanings from other quarters. The chronological list of De Quincey's magazine writings drawn up by Mr. H. G. Bohn, and inserted in the article "Quincey, De," in his edition of Lowndes's *Bibliographer's Manual*, has been of much use; and among smaller memoirs consulted I may mention the article on De Quincey in the current edition of the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, written by Mr. J. R. Findlay, one of the most intimate friends of De Quincey in his last years. At va-

rious points a little independent research has been found necessary, chiefly in the form of an inspection of the old volumes of the magazines and other periodicals in which De Quincey's papers originally appeared. For the rest, I have some advantage in having myself met and conversed with De Quincey, so as to retain a perfect recollection of his appearance, voice, and manner, and in being familiar with the scenes amid which he spent the last nine-and-twenty years of his life.

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DE QUINCEY.

CHAPTER I.

PARENTAGE, INFANCY, AND CHILDHOOD.

[1785-1796.]

DE QUINCEY took some pains to explain that his family was not, as the form of the name might suggest, a recent French importation into England, but had come in with the Conquest. Genealogists, indeed, find that the first of the English De Quinceys was a certain companion of the Conqueror, named Richard, probably of Norwegian descent, though hailing more immediately from the village or district of Quincé, in French Normandy. His descendants became great personages in England, reaching their highest in one or two De Quinceys who were Earls of Winchester in the thirteenth century. De Quincey, while dwelling with fondness on these associations with his name, admits that the Earls of Winchester, and their shadowy, Crusading retinue, "suddenly came to grief;" and that most of the English De Quinceys, for many generations before his own time, had been very insignificant and obscure persons. With other English families of like origin, they had dropped the aristocratic prefix *De*; in addition to which they had consented, in the easy old days of optional spelling, to be *Quincys*, or *Quincies*, or *Quinceys*, just as it might please their neighbours.

It seems to have been De Quincey himself—though he does not mention the matter—who resuscitated the prefix *De* (which he always wrote, however, with the small *d*, and not with the capital) in his particular branch of the family. His father, at all events, called himself Thomas Quincey. This father of De Quincey must have been a rather interesting man. He is described by his son as having been “literary to the extent of having written a book;” which book has been identified by very recent research with an anonymous octavo volume or pamphlet published in London in 1775, and entitled *A Short Tour in the Midland Counties of England, performed in the Summer of 1772: together with an Account of a Similar Excursion undertaken September, 1774.*“ The greater part of the contents of the volume had previously appeared in five successive instalments in the *Gentleman’s Magazine* for May, June, July, August, and September, 1774, under the title “A Tour in the Midland Counties of England, performed in the Summer of 1772. (By T—— Q——.)” And the separate publication, as a preface explains, was occasioned partly by the author’s resentment of the liberties that had been taken with the original text by the editor of the magazine, and partly by a desire to improve the piece into “a less soporific potion for the mental taste of his friends.” Though in the form of brief business-like notes, the performance is altogether very creditable. The jottings give the author’s observations of the state of farming, draining, manufactures, mining industry, &c., in the district traversed, with hints of decided opinions of his own on several vexed economic questions. There is an eye also for the picturesque in scenery, and for architectural beauties or defects in towns, churches, and country-seats; and the style is that of a well-educated man, accustomed to write

English. Once or twice the language rises towards the poetic, and once there is an admiring quotation from Beattie's *Minstrel*, the first part of which had recently appeared. At the time of this first and only literary venture of De Quincey's father he cannot have been more than three-and-twenty years of age; and one infers, from the matter of the performance, that he was then residing in London, in some commercial occupation which took him occasionally on a circuit northwards. There is a suggestion of previous acquaintance with Lincolnshire, and of some special connexion with that county. There would be little difficulty, we suppose, in investigating these antecedents of the interesting T. Q. of 1774; meanwhile, what concerns us here is, that within about five years from that date he is found settled in Manchester as a rising merchant, with his town-house or place of business in Fountain Street, and with extensive transactions and correspondence—especially with Portugal, America, and the West Indies. He had then married a Miss Penson, a lady of very good family connexions, two brothers of whom, younger than herself, went out soon afterwards to Bengal as officers in the service of the East India Company. Of this marriage there were born, between 1779 and 1792, eight children in all, four of them sons and four daughters. Our De Quincey—the fifth child and the second son—was born on the 15th of August, 1785, when his father was about thirty-three years of age, and his mother about three years younger.

The memoirs of De Quincey have been wonderfully unanimous in the statement that he was born at a country-house of his father's, called Greenhay, in what was then a perfectly rustic neighbourhood, about a mile out of Manchester. The statement is a blunder. De Quincey himself distinctly informs us that he was born *in* Manchester,

though he passed the whole of his childhood, after the first few weeks of his existence, in a rural seclusion near the town. He informs us further that this suburban seclusion, the habitual abode of the family after his birth, as distinct from the town-house or place of business which his father continued to keep up in Fountain Street, was first in "a pretty rustic dwelling" called *The Farm*, and not till about 1791 or 1792 in the larger country-house of *Greenhay*, which his father had then just built and equipped at an expense of about 6000*l*. The name *Greenhay*, he adds, was then an invention of his mother's, partly in recognition of the vicinity of a hamlet called Greenhill, and partly to signify, by revival of the old English word *hay*, meaning hedge or hedge-row (same as the French *haie*), that the domicile was characteristically a country mansion, with lawns and gardens, sequestered within gates and a verdant ring-fence. The priority of "The Farm" to "Greenhay" is indubitable.

In the life of De Quincey even such a trifle is worth noting. In no autobiography do the recollections of mere infancy and childhood occupy so much space, or count for so much, as in his. Accordingly, while the general impression he conveys of himself from his second or third year onwards is that of a very diminutive, shy, sensitive, and dreamy child, moving about, when out-of-doors, always on green turf or in garden-walks, and within-doors always among young brothers and sisters, in a house of wealthy and even luxurious elegance, the actual incidents of his infancy and childhood, which he has embalmed for us so carefully in such marvellous prose, have to be distributed between the two habitations above named, once visible on the rustic margin of Manchester, but now engulfed in its brick and uproar. It was at "The Farm" that he had

the "remarkable dream of terrific grandeur about a favourite nurse," which proved to him afterwards that his dreaming tendencies had been constitutional; it was here that the first sense of pathos had come over him, in watching, very early in spring, the appearance of some crocuses; and it was here that he had his first experiences of death in a household. Of his three sisters older than himself, Jane, the second in age, died before he was two years old; and he could remember the whisper that ran through the house, muffled so as not to reach his mother, of some harsh treatment of the dying sufferer by one of the female servants. Then, four years later, came the death of the eldest sister, Elizabeth, the gentlest and best beloved, his instructress and constant companion, whose image, and the signs of whose noble intellectual promise in her face and forehead, though she had not attained her tenth year, were to dwell with him, like a visionary guardianship from the spiritual world, through all the future years of his own life. Who can forget the pages in which he tells of the trance of reverie and delirium which fell upon him that bright midsummer day, when he had stolen alone into the chamber where the little corpse lay, and, in the flood of sunshine that streamed into the chamber from the cloudless sky without, there seemed suddenly to moan forth a solemn wind, "a wind that might have swept the fields of mortality for a thousand centuries," rising and swelling; till the eye partook of the magic of the ear, and the billows of unearthly music seemed to tend to a shaft that ran upwards in quest of the throne of God? All these incidents, in their literal original, or in the transfiguration given to them by poetic memory, have to be referred to the period when "Greenhay" was yet to come; and when we do enter that house, in the year 1792, it is with the

knowledge of a new fact in the family history. De Quincey, then in his seventh year, had seen, he tells us, so little of his father that, if the two had met anywhere by chance, they would not have known each other. The merchant, though in the prime of his manhood, had long been the prey of a pulmonary consumption; and for several years he had been in the habit, for the benefit of his health, while attending to his foreign and colonial business transactions, of residing as much as possible in Lisbon or Madeira, or in some of the West India Islands, with but occasional visits to England. But, one day, when the house of Greenhay was still somewhat of a novelty, and the mother had gone to meet her invalid husband at the port where he was expected, it was known to the children that their father was coming home. He was coming home, in fact, to die. For hours, in the summer evening, the children and servants had been on the lawn before the house, listening for the sound of wheels in the winding lane that led from the main road; and it was not till near midnight that the horses' heads emerged from the gloom, the carriage then approaching the house at a hearse-like pace, and the white pillows on which the invalid was propped catching the eye of the child and striking his imagination with a ghastly effect. For several weeks the invalid languished on a sofa, his quietest and most dreamy child admitted to him in his waking hours more than the rest, and standing beside him with the rest when he died.

By the father's death the family, consisting of the mother and six children, the last posthumously born, was left poorer than it had been, but still in clear possession of 1600*l.* a year. The allowance for each of the four sons was to be 150*l.* a year, and that for each of the two surviving daughters 100*l.* a year, while the rest seems to

have been left at the disposal of the mother. In the guardianship of the children till they came of age there were associated with the mother four selected friends of the father, living in or near Manchester; but the real management for the time was with the mother. De Quincey's mentions of his mother are uniformly respectful and reverent, with just a shade of critical remark on that side of her character which ruled her relations to himself. Of stately social ways and refined tastes, and of even rare natural endowments, she was, De Quincey says, though in no sense professedly a *literary* woman, yet emphatically "an *intellectual* woman," whose letters among her friends, if they could have been collected and published, would have been found hardly inferior, for the racy grace of their idiomatic English, to those of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu. But there was, he hints, a touch too much of Roman firmness or hardness in her, which, especially after her friendship with Hannah More and other notables of the Clapham Evangelical Sect had confirmed her in their rigid views of religion, disqualified her for the peculiarly sympathetic treatment required by at least one of her sons. The present writer knew a venerable lady who, in her youth, had seen much of De Quincey's mother; and her account tallied closely with De Quincey's own. Indeed, this venerable lady, being herself a strict religionist of the antique evangelical type, retained to the last an opinion of De Quincey which she had probably caught from colloquies with his mother concerning him in his most dubious days. A stately woman, every inch a lady, moving in the best county circles, and with her feet on the Rock of Ages—such was, and always had been, De Quincey's mother. As for the son, celebrity or no celebrity, what was he but a waif?

For four years after the death of De Quincey's father, or from 1792 to 1796, the widow continued to live at Greenhay, with her orphan children about her, doing her best for their education. We hardly know when De Quincey began to read and write; but, from all he tells us of the years of his life that have now been sketched, one infers that, with perhaps too little music or other kindred recreation in the house, reading had been absolutely unrestricted for him and his sisters, and that he had been always with one of them when he could, or in a quiet corner by himself, conning some delicious piece of juvenile verse or prose. Dr. Johnson and Cowper were then the English authors of greatest recent repute; but, in addition to the Bible, it is of Mrs. Barbauld's books and the *Arabian Nights* that we hear as first fascinating the De Quincey children and moving them to questions. In one very suggestive chapter, treating of the power of individual passages in books to find out the minds fitted for their reception, De Quincey cites as an instance in his own case the effect upon him, in his childhood, of the opening passage in the story of Aladdin. That there should be a magician dwelling in the depths of Africa, and aware of an enchanted lamp, imprisoned somewhere in a subterranean chamber, which could be found out only by the child predestined for the adventure, and that this magician, by putting his ear to the ground and listening to the sounds of the footsteps of all the human beings living on the globe, should know for certain that the predestined finder of the lamp was a little boy then running about, thousands of miles off, in the streets of Bagdad, was a revelation of the universal connexions of things which gave rise to no end of pondering. This from the *Arabian Nights*, and an anecdote of noble re-

venge picked out of an historical miscellany, were, we are given to understand, the passages of literature that had fastened most strongly on the little De Quincey at the time when his sister Elizabeth was still alive to share his enthusiasms. At the date at which we have now arrived, however, there was a change of circumstances. The boy had come to an age when home-teaching and miscellaneous voluntary reading were to be supplemented by something more regular, in the shape of daily lessons under a tutor conveniently near. The tutor chosen was the Rev. S. H., one of the guardians of the children by their father's will, and then curate of a church in the part of Manchester called Salford. To the house of this Mr. S. H., about two miles from Greenhay, the little fellow was to trudge daily for his lessons in the morning, returning in the afternoon. This would not have mattered much if he had remained still the eldest boy in the Greenhay household. But, since the father's death, there had come to live at Greenhay, and to partake in the lessons of Mr. S. H. at Salford, Master William De Quincey himself, the very top of the family, full twelve years of age, or about five years older than Thomas. Hitherto Thomas had known little or nothing of this senior brother of his, who had been for some time with his father in Lisbon, and then, proving unmanageable, had been sent to the Grammar School of Louth, in Lincolnshire. But now he was to know enough. Never was such a boy as this William De Quincey—such a boisterous, frank, pugilistic, clever, inventive, not unlikable, but wholly unendurable, son of eternal racket. "His genius for mischief amounted to inspiration," reports his principal victim. For no sooner had he arrived than he had taken possession of the house and all in it like a whirlwind, and poor little Thomas, as

the next living thing under him, had been collared by him at once for his fag and spaniel.

It is not for nothing that De Quincey heads the long chapter of more than eighty pages in which he treats of the time of his subjection to the despotism of his stormy elder brother with the words *Introduction to the World of Strife*. Digressive as that chapter is, one receives from it a unity of general impression corresponding to the title. One can see that, during the three years and a half of which so much fun is made in the retrospect, the nervous little creature who had been linked to such a steam-engine of a brother was in the main very miserable. It was not merely that his brother had picked a quarrel with the boys of a cotton-factory on the skirts of Manchester, just at the point where the road from Greenhay entered the town by a particular bridge, and that once or twice every day, as they went and came between Greenhay and their tutor's house in Salford, there had to be a battle at this spot between them and some of the factory boys, every recurrence of which threw the little creature into new terror. It was that his very thoughts and imaginations were no longer his own, but were dictated to him and shaped for him by the energies of his companion. The war with the factory boys itself, for example, became a double torment by being idealized by his brother into a great enterprise in which he was commander-in-chief, with absolute powers, while Thomas was the responsible second. For his conduct in the campaign from day to day in this character of responsible second was not only incessantly discussed by the commander-in-chief in their colloquies along the road, but was the subject of merciless comment in bulletins and gazettes published by the commander-in-chief for the benefit of Mrs. Evans, the house-keeper at Greenhay,

and the rest of the world there. Now he was promoted to be major-general, as having done pretty well; now he was under arrest for cowardice and was to be drummed out of the army; again, restored to his rank by the intercession of a distinguished lady (Mrs. Evans), he received also the Order of the Bath; and once he was in danger of being hanged for treacherous correspondence with the enemy. Nor was this all. Besides being commander-in-chief in the war with the factory boys, his brother was king of an imaginary kingdom called Tigrosylvania; and poor De Quincey, to accommodate him in his Napoleonic propensities to invasion, was obliged to be king of another imaginary kingdom called Gombroon. Then not only was Gombroon liable to invasion by the Tigrosylvanians, but the wretched government of Gombroon and the low state of civilization among the Gombroonians became a subject of perpetual sarcasm on the part of the Tigrosylvanian monarch. The lowest depth of De Quincey's degradation in the matter was when his brother, having been reading an extract from Monboddo, informed him gravely that he had ascertained that the Gombroonians were still in the primitive condition of mankind, not having advanced so far as even to acquire those sedentary habits the continuance of which through ages would remove their tails, and advised him to issue an edict requiring them all to sit for at least six hours every day—which, he said, though it could not do much, would make a beginning. It was the same in all the other relations between the imperious young sultan of the family and his junior brothers and sisters. In his pyrotechnics for their amusement, his lectures to them on chemistry and natural philosophy, his dramatic recitations, he was always lord-paramount, and they were his thralls. Of De Quincey

himself his opinion, frankly intimated from the first, was that he was physically contemptible and mentally an idiot, though with some good moral qualities. Of the truth of this opinion, communicated so authoritatively, De Quincey says he had at first no doubt. It coincided with that idea of himself into which he had settled in those moping days of childish melancholy and reverie which his brother's arrival in Greenhay had disturbed; and he would have been only too glad if "that solid foundation of utter despicableness" to which he had learned to trust had been left unshaken. On the whole, he thinks, it was perhaps well that it was shaken. Left to himself with his other young brothers and sisters, he might have moped on till the taint of consumption had been developed in him; and his vehement elder brother's discipline had acted as a rough febrifuge.

Meanwhile the lessons with the Rev. Mr. S. H. had been sufficiently profitable. A conscientious man, though decidedly dull, he had grounded De Quincey well in Latin, and entered him in Greek; and there had been, moreover, a special excrescence from the tutorship, which, though irksome, had been beneficial. Mr. H. had a stock of three hundred and thirty sermons, each about sixteen minutes long, which, at the rate of two sermons every Sunday, served as spiritual nutriment for his congregation for a cycle of three years. The De Quincey family having to come in their carriage from Greenhay to church, it was only the forenoon sermon that the boy heard; but of this he was expected regularly to give in a correct abstract in the course of the week. As the tutor did not allow notes to be taken, the exercise of memory was of lasting benefit. To these results of the tutorship add the results of the continued readings of the boy

through the three years and a half, whether in connexion with the lessons or independently. As before, he dwells on individual passages that had impressed him. One passage that sank into him with a mystic sense of power was the phrase in the book of Daniel, "Belshazzar the king made a great feast to a thousand of his lords." Another instance is even more remarkable. No reader of De Quincey but must have observed how frequent and important a word in his vocabulary is the word *Pariah*, meaning "social outcast," and what a hold had been taken of his imagination by the idea that an immense proportion of the men and women of the world, in all ages and all lands, had belonged to the class of *Pariahs*, the socially outcast for one reason or another, the despised, the unrespectable, the maltreated and down-trodden. Well, this idea, if his own dating is to be trusted, had been fixed in him irrevocably even in the present early period of his life. It was implanted in him first by the ineffable feeling of sublimity which he attached to those lines in the Epilogue to the second book of the Fables of Phædrus where that Latin fabulist, who had himself been a slave, exulted in the recollection that his predecessor, the Greek slave *Æsop*, had triumphed by his genius over the circumstances of his birth:

"Æsopi ingenio statuam posuere Attici,
Servumque collocarunt æterna in basi,
Patere honoris scirent ut cunctis viam,
Nec generi tribui sed virtuti gloriam."¹

¹ De Quincey quotes only the first two lines of these four, translating them "*A colossal statue did the Athenians raise to Æsop, and a poor pariah slave they planted upon an everlasting pedestal.*" The rest may run "*This they did in acknowledgment of the fact that the path of honour is open to all, and that glory belongs not to birth but to worth.*"

But it was not from this passage alone, nor from mere literature, that he derived the idea in its full extension. It chanced that in the house of a certain reverend gentleman there were two twin girls, his daughters, who were deaf and scrofulous and reputed to be all but idiots, and whom therefore their mother, ashamed of them and disliking them, kept as much out of sight as possible, using them as menial drudges, and cruel to them otherwise, while the father, whatever he may have thought, did not interfere. The acute boy, prying about the house, and coming to know and pity the girls, had laid the case to heart. Were not these girls also *Pariahs*, and were there not other concealed varieties of *Pariahs* in Christian England?

It had been arranged by the guardians that the elder brother, who had shown a talent for drawing, should go into training for the profession of an artist by becoming pupil to the distinguished London landscape-painter and Royal Academician, De Louthembourg. As the parting with his brother was to be a new starting-point in De Quincey's life, he remembered it well, the more by token of an incident of the very last morning of his brother's stay at Greenhay. It was a splendid June morning, before breakfast, and all the six children were together in the grounds in front of the house, from Sultan William, now in his sixteenth year, down to the youngest. William was full of frolic, with the two girls laughing and dancing beside him, and the baby Henry near in the nurse's arms; Richard, called familiarly "Pink," the next to De Quincey in age, was wheeling round on his heel at some distance; while De Quincey himself was standing close to the edge of a brook which bounded the grounds on that part where they were not protected from the lane by a railing and

the gates. Suddenly there was a vast uproar in the lane, the noise of a shouting and running mob coming nearer and nearer, explained at last by the appearance of a great dog, much ahead of his pursuers, and panting and foaming at the mouth. The dog tried the gates, which were fortunately shut; then stood for a moment on the edge of the brook directly opposite to De Quincey, as if meditating a leap across; and then, amid the scare of the children, all except the intrepid William, who taunted and challenged the dog to come over, broke away again along the lane, followed by the long hullabaloo of men and boys, with guns, sticks, and pitchforks. It was a mad dog from a barracks, which had already that morning bitten two horses. He led his pursuers a chase of many miles before he was killed. One of the two horses he had bitten died afterwards of hydrophobia. What if he had leaped the brook?

CHAPTER II.

BOYHOOD AND CHANGES OF SCHOOL, WITH A TOUR IN IRELAND.

[1796-1802.]

SOME time in 1796, De Quincey's mother having made up her mind to live at Bath, the establishment at Greenhay was broken up, and the house and grounds were sold. After being boarded for a while in Manchester, for continuation of the lessons under Mr. S. H., De Quincey followed his mother to Bath, and was entered at the Grammar School of the town, then presided over by a Mr. Morgan, an excellent classical scholar. He was then in his twelfth year, and was to have as one of his school-fellows his brother Richard, already mentioned by his nickname of "Pink," about four years younger than himself, and a boy of exquisite beauty, and of a sweet gentleness that made him the most absolute contrast to the terrible William. Of that young hurricane and all his problematical capabilities De Quincey had seen the last. He died of typhus-fever soon after he had become pupil to the Academician De Louthembourg.

De Quincey remained at the Bath Grammar School about two years. From the first he had the reputation of a little prodigy in it, especially in Latin, and most especially for Latin verse-making. In this accomplishment he had such success that the head-master used to parade his

exercises publicly by way of reproach to the stiff Latinity of the boys of the first form, most of whom were five or six years older. On the other hand, he was at first somewhat backward in Greek—on which account he had been placed under the second of the Bath School masters, rather than with the more advanced boys under Mr. Morgan himself. For some time there was a cabal among these advanced boys against the little interloper who was snatching from them the honours in Latin. On the whole, however, he was comfortable enough, and was rapidly attaining an unusual facility in speaking and writing Greek, when an accident led to his removal from the school. The most exact account of this accident is found in a boyish letter of his own, which chances to have survived. It is dated March 12, 1799, and was addressed to his sister Mary, then at a school in Bristol. "This day six weeks," are his words, "as we were up saying [repeating our lessons], Mr. M. was called out, and so forsooth little, or rather *big*, Mounseer Collins [one of the under-masters] must jump into the desk. It happened that little Harman minor wanted his hat, which hung up over Collins' head. Wilbraham asked for the cane to reach it him, which Collins refused; and at the same time, to give a little strength, I suppose, to his refusal, and to enforce his authority as a master, endeavoured to hit him on the shoulder (as *he* says): but how shall I relate the sequel? On poor Ego did it fall. Say, Muse, what could inspire the cane with such a direful purpose? But not on my shoulder, on my *pate*, it fell—unhappy *pate*, worthy of a better fate!" The blow on the head, thus playfully described, seemed serious at the time. For some weeks De Quincey lay in his mother's house in Bath, attended by physicians and under severe regimen. In the weeks of his gradual recov-

ery his mother read to him steadily till he could resume reading for himself. Among the books thus read he mentions Sir William Jones's *Asiatic Researches*, Milner's *Church History*, Johnson's *Rambler*, Hoole's *Translations of Ariosto and Tasso*, with the notable addition of *Paradise Lost*, which had come to him, strangely enough, in Bentley's grotesque edition. At the same time he and his brother Pink had lessons in French.

Although the head-master and others interested in Bath Grammar School tried to get back their little prodigy, the mother would not consent. She sent him and his brother Pink to a private school at Winkfield, in Wiltshire, "of which the chief recommendation lay in the religious character of the master." Here he remained about a year, not thinking much of "old Spencer," the master, but a great favourite with the Miss Spencers, and with the thirty or forty boarders. Fifty years afterwards, two of his school-fellows, clergymen of the Church of England, could remember him at Spencer's as a most obliging and companionable little fellow, willing to help any of the boys in their Latin or Greek, and a leader in their amusements, to which he would always give a literary turn. He divided the boys for their mimic fights into Greeks and Trojans, taking the part of Ulysses himself; and, in his capacity of contributor-in-chief to a journal carried on by the boys and the Miss Spencers, he replied in pungent English verses to a challenge by the boys of a neighbouring school. It was remembered also that, when his mother came to visit the school, and the boys talked of her as a friend of Hannah More, he would tell them with pride that his mother was quite as clever as Hannah.

Hardly more than a year had been spent at Winkfield when the connexion with that school was brought to an

end by an invitation to De Quincey of a kind which his mother did not see fit to refuse. During the time of the convalescence at Bath, in the spring of 1799, an acquaintance had sprung up between De Quincey and young Lord Westport, the only child of John-Denis, third Earl of Altamont of the Irish peerage, afterwards Marquis of Sligo. The boy, whom De Quincey represents as almost exactly of his own age, but whom the peerage books represent as considerably younger, had been then in the neighbourhood of Bath, with his tutor, Mr. Grace. He and his tutor had been asked to Mrs. De Quincey's house; and now, after more than a year, during which his young lordship had been at Eton, there came the invitation we speak of. It was an invitation to join Lord Westport at Eton and accompany him in a long holiday on his father's estates in county Mayo, in the West of Ireland. Arrangements having been duly made, De Quincey did set out for Eton in the summer of 1800, to begin a ramble and round of visits in England and Ireland, which extended over four or five months.

Eton itself was a good beginning. That classic town, as all the world ought to know, is really part and parcel of Windsor, within whose royal precincts is Frogmore, a seat of royalty subsidiary to Windsor Castle. Now, as George III. and his Queen, with the Princesses, were at Frogmore in the summer of 1800, and as Lord Westport not only had the run of Frogmore grounds, but was specially known to the royal family, as the son and heir-apparent of the Earl of Altamont, and as grandson by his mother of the lately deceased Earl Howe, the famous Admiral, what was to prevent De Quincey, in such good company, from having an interview with his Majesty himself? This, he tells us, actually occurred. The King, recognizing Lord

Westport in one of the Frogmore walks, stopped him and talked with him a little, and then, turning to his companion, whose name he had somehow already heard, asked whether he too was at Eton, and whether his father was alive, and whether his mother thought of sending him to Eton—a capital school, none better!—and whether his family was of French Huguenot descent. To all which De Quincey returned, he says, brief and modest answers, only throwing a little energy into his repudiation of any recent French origin, and informing his Majesty that the English De Quinceys were as old as the Conquest, and were mentioned in the very earliest of English books, Robert of Gloucester's *Metrical Chronicle*. "I know, I know," said the King, with a smile, as if he remembered such a book in his library, but did not like to commit himself on the subject with such a knowing little shrimp; and the interview ended, the two boys stepping backward a few paces and bowing profoundly, while his Majesty moved away. This, however, was not De Quincey's last sight of the King. He had the honour of being invited, with Lord Westport, to one or two of the *fêtes* which the Queen was then giving at Frogmore, and did attend one of them—in a travelling-dress, as his mother heard with horror, till he explained to her in a letter that his travelling-dress was a very good one, "much better than what Lord Westport had on," and that in such a crush it did not matter. The stay at Eton was broken by a run to London. It was De Quincey's first sight of the great metropolis, and he is punctual in dating it as in the month of May.

From Eton, where De Quincey, as he informed his mother very penitentially, could not avoid going once to a play in Windsor Theatre to oblige Lord Westport, the two lads, with the tutor, began their journey for Ireland on the

18th of July. Travelling through North Wales, they reached Holyhead, where the tutor was to leave them. At that place the tutor, who had taken mysterious offence at something or other, and apparently begun to have doubts about De Quincey, ceased to speak with either of the lads, but duly saw them aboard the packet that was to take them to Dublin. The passage of thirty hours, the arrival in Dublin, the first impressions of that city, and the various incidents and pleasures of the fortnight or so passed there, are described at considerable length in the subsequent autobiographic record. It was an unusually interesting time in the history of Ireland, for it was the time of the completion in the Irish Parliament of the Bill for the Union of Ireland with Great Britain. Introduced to his friend's father, the Earl of Altamont, "a very fat man, and so lame that he is obliged to have two servants to support him whenever he stirs," De Quincey had access to all the sights and demonstrations of the crisis. He was present at the splendid ceremony of the installation of the Knights of St. Patrick; and he was present in the last sittings of the Irish House of Peers, when the Union Act was passed. He saw the Lord Lieutenant Cornwallis, Lord and Lady Castlereagh, and other great public persons; and he saw the surgings in the streets of excited Irish mobs. From such personal reminiscences of his Dublin visit he deviates into a general essay on the social and political state of Ireland at the time, with particular accounts of the two recent Irish Rebellions, &c.; and it is when we are extricated from these that we find him at last, about the 20th of August, at Lord Altamont's seat of Westport, in Connaught. There, in a big house, with but a slovenly collection of books in it, but with wild Irish scenery round about for excursions, wild Irish horses to ride, and wilder

Irish grooms to study, he spent some weeks pleasantly enough, coaching Lord Westport at odd moments, it would seem, in Greek and Latin.

One starry experience dwelt with him all the while. In that part of his journey from Dublin to Connaught which had been performed on the Grand Canal, leading from Dublin to Tullamore, there had been among his fellow-passengers in the canal-boat the widowed Countess of Errol, in deep mourning, and her sister, Miss Blake. Both ladies were of Irish birth; and both were young, beautiful, and accomplished. Introduced by Lord Westport, De Quincey was for a time in Elysium. Mentioning the rencontre in a letter to his mother at the time, all that he says is that "in the canal-boat was a Miss Blake, a sister of the present Countess Dowager of Errol," and that they "formed an acquaintance and talked about the English poets for the whole afternoon." It is in the Autobiography that we learn the whole truth. Miss Blake, with her soft eyes and soft Irish voice, her Irish gaiety and affluence in talk, had impressed him as he had never been impressed before. "From this day," he says, "I was an altered creature, never again relapsing into the careless irreflective mind of childhood."

Returning from Ireland to England in October, 1800, the two friends parted at Birmingham; and one observes it as rather curious that Lord Westport is hardly heard of again in De Quincey's history, whether under the title of Earl of Altamont, which he could assume by courtesy before the year closed, in consequence of his father's promotion to the Marquisate of Sligo, or under that of Marquis of Sligo, which was his own from 1809 to 1845. Meanwhile we are not quite done with De Quincey's ramble. From Birmingham, as instructed by a letter from his

mother, he went to Laxton, in Northamptonshire, where his elder sister already was. It was the seat of Lord and Lady Carbery, the latter of whom, in her unmarried condition as Miss Watson, a wealthy heiress, had long been an intimate young friend of his mother's. A Lord and Lady Massey were also staying at Laxton, and Lord Carbery himself arrived from Ireland; and, as there was a fine library in the house, with all the appurtenances of luxurious culture, a month or two of rest in such English seclusion was very acceptable after so much rough Irish locomotion. Lady Carbery, a handsome woman of about six-and-twenty, was abundantly kind to the boy, both for his mother's sake and his own. She arranged that he should have daily lessons in riding, to which he submitted, with no very effective result; she called him her "Admirable Crichton," and taxed all his resources of acquired knowledge; and in one department she became his grateful pupil. Having imbibed the sentiments of the Evangelical School of Religion, with Hannah More and Mrs. De Quincey for her exemplars, but having a strong and inquiring intellect, she had begun a systematic study of Theology, and had come to be vexed by the question whether the authorized English version of the Bible could be relied on as presenting the exact doctrinal truth on all points. Her young adviser having assured her that on some points it could not, she felt as if her salvation might depend on her having a Greek New Testament and a Parkhurst's Greek Lexicon beside her; and De Quincey, having encouraged the idea, had the pleasure of setting her agoing in her Greek studies. Altogether he was very happy at Laxton, and there can hardly be a pleasanter picture than that of the high-minded young matron of the mansion, a kind of English variety of Goethe's "Fair

Saint," looking after her youthful guest, on the one hand, as a feeble boy that needed superintendence, and, on the other hand, finding instruction for hours in listening to his suggestive, eloquent, and prematurely learned talk.

The effects upon De Quincey's mind of his long ramble, with the varied glimpses it had given him of the actual world, and especially of an aristocratic section of it, had been, he says, something extraordinary. The rate of his intellectual expansion, he says, was no longer like the movement of the hour hand of the watch, whose advance, though certain, is matter of inference, but was like the visible pace of the seconds hand. One may question whether a matter-of-fact person would not rather have described the effects of his tour and its incidents as perturbing and unsettling.

Experience seems to have decided that, in the majority of cases, the wisest plan for parents and guardians in the education of a boy is to find out the best established routine of public schooling for boys in his circumstances, and to keep to that inflexibly through all its stages for the usual period. This seems to have been De Quincey's own belief. Of the two schools he had been at he greatly preferred Bath Grammar School; it had been against his will that he had been removed from it; and in his letters to his mother from Ireland he had argued earnestly for a return to that school, if to any, till he should be thought of age for the University. In any case, he objected to being sent to another private school, like that at Winkfield. "I was at the head of the school the whole time I was there. No one but myself could make verses and all those kinds of things; but then I had no one to contend with, nor anything higher to aspire to. The consequence was that my powers entirely flagged; my mind became dormant in comparison with what it was at the Bath Grammar School."

These remonstrances were so far attended to that, when he left Lady Carbery's at Laxton, the arrangement of his mother and guardians was that he should not be sent again to any private school, but should go for three years to the Grammar School of his native town of Manchester. Their chief reason was a pecuniary one. Among the endowments of Manchester Grammar School were certain exhibitions by which boys who had been regularly at the school for three full years could be sent to Brasenose College, Oxford, with 40*l.* or 50*l.* a year guaranteed them for seven years. With 50*l.* a year added to his patrimonial inheritance of 150*l.*, De Quincey would be able, in his nineteenth year, to go to Oxford in proper gentlemanly style, with an annual 200*l.* for his expenses.

With sighs and forebodings, De Quincey did go to Manchester Grammar School, some time late in 1800, for his three years of drudgery. His account of the school, and of the head-master, Mr. Lawson, in whose house he was boarded, is far from unfriendly on the whole. Mr. Lawson, though in his declining years, and not quite at ease with his own head boys in their higher Greek readings, was kind, conscientious, and exemplary; the school was an ancient and rich one, with historical traditions and good appliances and accommodations; the discipline was maintained entirely by moral means, which was rather rare at that time; and the boarders, with whom De Quincey had principally to associate, were mostly Lancashire youths of good manners and principles, with a collective amount of knowledge and ability among them, especially in English literature, which rather surprised the new-comer at first. He had a pleasant little room at the top of the house, and books at will by a subscription to the Manchester library. But there were objections. He does

not positively include among these the fact that many of the day-boys in the school were sons of artisans, some of them even having "sisters that were menial servants," but he mentions the fact; and he admits generally that the whole atmosphere of Manchester, where he could not stir out-of-doors without being "nosed by a factory, a cotton-bag, a cotton dealer, or something else allied to that detestable commerce," had become insufferably uncongenial. It was, however, the monotony of the school life itself that put him out of spirits—the sight day after day of the same bare, white-washed walls, the dull repetition from day to day of petty linguistic tasks that had no stimulus for him now, and were far beneath his capacity. Above all, the total deprivation of physical exercise inflicted on Mr. Lawson's boarders by his absurd system of regulating their hours from morning to evening, with "callings-over" even in the intervals for meals and rest, had a ruinous effect on De Quincey's health. For some time he had been enabled to bear up against the complicated miseries by accidental compensations. Lady Carbery had been in Manchester for some months, with a portion of her household, just after his entry into the new school; a venerable old clergyman of the town, of Swedenborgian views, and author of various Swedenborgian tracts, had taken a fancy for the extraordinary lad and his conversation, and liked him to call; and, in one or two runs to Liverpool, an acquaintance had been struck up with the club of *literati* of which that town could then boast, and of which Roscoe, and Dr. Currie, the biographer of Burns, were the chiefs. But, after a year and a half at the school, the prospect of another year and a half became intolerable. In a letter to his mother, still extant, he pleads most pitifully for his immediate removal. He

enumerates, and emphasizes in italic words, his five individual causes of complaint, and then rolls them all in characteristic fashion into one collective sixth. How could a person be happy, he asks, or even simply easy, "in a situation which deprives him of *health*, of *society*, of *amusement*, of *liberty*, of *congeniality of pursuits*, and which, to complete the precious picture, admits of no *variety*?" Even this pitiful pleading was of no avail, and De Quincey was driven to a desperate resolution. He resolved to run away. After brooding over the resolution for some time, and procuring the necessary funds from Lady Carbery, who, knowing nothing of her young friend's purpose, sent him 10*l*. in answer to his application by letter for 5*l*., he carried it into effect by slipping out of Mr. Lawson's house early one morning in July, 1802. He had an English poet in one pocket, and an odd volume of Euripides in the other. He was then close on seventeen years of age.

CHAPTER III.

VAGRANCY IN NORTH WALES AND IN LONDON.

[1802-1803.]

DE QUINCEY's first intention, when he had made up his mind to run away from Manchester School, was to wander towards the district of the English Lakes. The magnet that attracted him thither was Wordsworth, some of whose poems he had recently read. Oh, to be in the neighbourhood of that man, to see the house in which he dwelt, the scenes amid which he moved; perhaps to catch a glimpse of himself! Alive, however, to the absurdity of any such approach to Wordsworth in the character of a runaway school-boy, and also to the duty of some communication first of all with his mother, he had determined to run the risks involved in the latter course. As his mother had by this time got tired of B. h, and transferred herself to a house in Chester, called the Priory, the communication was not difficult. Two days of walking carried him over the forty miles that separated Manchester from Chester; and, after some hovering about the house, of which he gives a whimsical account, the meeting took place. His mother, with her notions and habits of decorum, looked upon the occurrence, he says, "much as she would have done upon the opening of the seventh seal in the Revelations;" but it chanced that another relative was at hand who took a lighter view of the affair. This was his uncle,

Colonel Thomas Penson, his mother's only surviving brother, home from India on a three years' furlough, and quartered for the time, with his horses and Bengalee servants, at the Priory. Colonel Penson, a kindly man of the world, saw nothing unnatural in the desire of a youth to elope from the tedium of school; and, by his advice, it was arranged that De Quincey, if he did not choose to remain at the Priory, should have a guinea a week allowed him for a while, with liberty to wander about and enjoy himself on that basis.

From July to November, 1802, we see him wandering about North Wales, from town to town, from village to village, from country-inn to country-inn, having various little adventures and picking up random new acquaintances by the way, all the while making his guinea a week go as far as it could, and hitting on ingenious devices for that end. The chief was that of alternating, according to whim and weather, between the more expensive style of living, at the rate of about half a guinea a day, necessary if he went to the better inns, and the incredibly cheap living then possible in Wales if one lodged in the cottages of the hospitable and unsophisticated Welsh peasantry, or snatched a meal somewhere in a long walk and bivouacked through the night among ferns and furze. It was, he says, a most pleasant existence, an existence of breezy freedom, with perpetual delight from the mountain scenery, the sylvan nooks, the rushing brooks, the picturesque evening groups of the villagers gathered round their harpers. But the sting of some unsatisfied craving, the fatal longing in his nature to break away from the customary and respectable, and to dare the forbidden and indefinite, carried him suddenly out of those Welsh solitudes. He would give up his guinea a week, cut that

remaining bond between him and his mother and guardians, and bury himself in the world of London. There he would find books and society; there he would find he knew not what; there he would find—at least so he had heard—Jew money-lenders, who might be willing to advance him 200*l.* on his expectations.

It was late in November, 1802, when, having borrowed twelve guineas from two lawyer friends in Oswestry, De Quincey, after eight-and-twenty hours on the coach from Shrewsbury, was deposited in the streets of London. Here what months he passed—what months of wild, haggard, Bohemian roaming and staggering from worse to worse! He had lost no time in applying to a Jew money-lender named Dell; but Dell was never himself to be seen in such cases, and the negotiation had to be with Dell's devil, or legal factotum. This was a low attorney, called Brunell, who had for his place of business a house in Greek Street, Soho, at the corner of Soho Square, with precautionary chains on the doors, and loop-holes through which those who knocked could be surveyed before they were admitted. As we read the description of this house in Greek Street, with all its rooms unoccupied and unfurnished, save Mr. Brunell's own sanctum, and some den for his athletic clerk, Pymont, and of Mr. Brunell's arrivals in it every morning from no one knew where, and his disappearances in the evening, when his sanctum was carefully locked and the empty house was left in the sole keeping of a poor little wretch of a girl, ten years of age, who slept on straw as near as she could to the street-door, we feel as if we were in the midst of a novel by Dickens. With Brunell himself De Quincey became very familiar by frequent visits, and found him, disreputable though he was, a very kindly person, and with a wonderful passion

for literature and knowledge, the survival from some happier time when he had hopes of another career than that of a devil for money-lenders. But Brunell could do nothing himself in the matter of the advance, for there was the invisible Dell in the background. The policy of Dell, in such cases, was that of delay—delay for the necessary investigations, for whetting the appetite of the applicant, and for exacting charges for papers, stamps, and one knows not what. Thus the lad, though living as parsimoniously as he could in lodgings, was brought to his last guinea, and it was an act of charity when Brunell consented to let him use the house in Greek Street as his sleeping asylum at nights. There, sharing a floor in the void tenement with the little wretch of a servant-girl, to whom his advent was a godsend, as a deliverance from her terrors of loneliness, he did sleep, night after night, for some indefinite period, glad to pick up stray crusts in the morning from Brunell's breakfast-table. But, his presence in the house during the day being undesirable, he had to be off every morning, to "sit in the parks or elsewhere," or prowl about the streets, as he chose. And what streets he thus came to know, and what eternal circuits among the same streets! Regent Street then was not; and his main range was the great thoroughfare of Oxford Street, with the streets to the north of it as far as the New Road, and the maze of streets on the other or southern side as far as the line of Coventry Street and Piccadilly. Within those bounds he was a peripatetic through days of which he kept no reckoning, and often late at nights, till the watchmen began to recognise his figure, and would sometimes rouse him roughly as he sat on door-steps. As was natural, he became acquainted with other peripatetics, the "street-walkers" in another

sense. With this class of unfortunates, and with not a few individuals among them, he tells us, his relations were intimate enough, though all in perfect innocence. One in chief he could never forget. Oh! that Ann of Oxford Street, the poor girl of sixteen, whose simple and sad history he had come to know, whose goodness of heart shone out even in her degradation, with whom it had become his daily habit to go about by appointment, and who had once saved his life, when he had fainted from exhaustion, by running for wine and stimulants and fetching them for him out of her own scanty money!

A favourable impression had been at last produced on Dell by proofs of De Quincey's former intimacy with Lord Altamont and the Marquis of Sligo. If Mr. De Quincey could fortify his own mere personal security by getting Lord Altamont to be his co-security, Mr. Dell would not mind lending him 200*l.* or even 300*l.* A casual encounter with an old family friend in Albemarle Street having at the same time provided De Quincey with a little ready cash, he bade Ann farewell for a day or two, and took the coach for Eton to broach the matter to Lord Altamont. Unfortunately his lordship had just left Eton for Cambridge; and all that De Quincey could effect was a provisional arrangement with another young nobleman at Eton, which he thought might answer Mr. Dell's purpose. When he returned to London Ann was gone! He never saw her or heard of her more. All his life afterwards that girl was to be in his thoughts. Ah! poor Ann of Oxford Street, what had become of her? Had she gone into some ruffianly keeping, and might she be still alive; or had that cough which he had observed in her done its merciful work, and was her young frame at rest, though but in a pauper's grave, in some dank corner of a London church-yard?

Is all this true, or was De Quincey romancing? He was himself aware that there might be some such suspicion; and when, immediately after the first publication of his *Confessions*, some of his critics were taking them for ingenious fiction, he was very serious in his efforts to undeceive them. He had not told the *whole* truth about his London vagrancy, he said, because that was impossible, but he had told nothing but the truth. Such an assurance ought itself to count for something; but there is more. In early private letters of De Quincey, published by Mr. Page, we have the means of checking portions of his subsequent autobiographical writings; and, as in all cases where this check can be applied the correspondence between the original memorials and the later narrative is strikingly exact, a slight occasional haziness of date excepted, the rest of the narrative is entitled to the benefit of the fact. In short, though there may be a little mingling of the *Dichtung* with the *Wahrheit*, De Quincey's account of his days of London wretchedness may be accepted as authentic. And why not? True, it could only have been a most odd, unpractical little creature that could have got himself into such conditions, or that, once in them, could not have extricated himself. But are there not such queer young eccentrics in the world even now—creatures of cleverness touched with some craze or peculiarity, which makes them a puzzle to their friends, and which, while incapacitating them for the most obvious acts of reasonableness natural to ordinary people, leads them sometimes to acts at which ordinary people stare? That eccentricity of De Quincey which was to be a life-long characteristic, and even that form of eccentricity which was to be peculiarly his in after-life—a constant shy timorousness, a perpetual looking backward over his

shoulder for some terrible danger that he had escaped, but that was still dogging him—seems to have been first developed in those days of his strange London experiences in his eighteenth year. When Carlyle knew him, long afterwards, and when his small stature, boyish face, gentle demeanour, and beautiful silvery talk were the most obvious things about him to first observation, something more, Carlyle thought, was physiognomically discernible. "*Eccovi!* look at him: this child has been in Hell."

The proposed substitute for Lord Altamont's guarantee of co-security not being satisfactory to Mr. Dell, De Quincey was at the extreme of despair, when, by some unexplained concatenation of circumstances, he was discovered and reclaimed by his friends. He went back to Chester, to reside for some time with his mother in the Priory. His Indian uncle was still there, and it was some tetchy but well-intentioned remark of this good gentleman in a moment of argument that induced De Quincey to close with a shabby offer made by his guardians, to the effect that he might go to the University if he liked, but should not have a farthing more than 100*l.* a year. On this allowance, in the autumn of 1803, as nearly as the date can be guessed, he went to Worcester College, Oxford.

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CHAPTER IV.

MAINLY AT OXFORD, WITH VISITS TO LONDON AND THE
LAKES.

[1803-1809.]

OF De Quincey's Oxford life very little is known. There is a casual hint from himself that he had made a mistake in his choice of a college. Had he gone to Brasenose, as would have happened if he had remained for the necessary time at Manchester Grammar School, he would have had a smooth and properly arranged introduction to the academic life, whereas in Worcester College he was an isolated stranger, left to shift for himself. All that the head of the college, Dr. Cotton, could afterwards remember of him was summed up in a few sentences. "During the period of his residence," says Dr. Cotton, "he was generally known as a quiet and studious man. He did not frequent wine-parties, though he did not abstain from wine; and he devoted himself principally to the society of a German, named Schwartzburg, who is said to have taught him Hebrew. He was remarkable even in those days for his rare conversational powers, and for his extraordinary stock of information upon every subject that was started." Altogether, though he had some acquaintances in different colleges, and was known among them as a very uncommon person, he seems rather to have crept through the University quietly than to have made any stir in it, keeping

much by himself, and reading prodigiously in lines of his own. The recluseness was not owing to the extreme necessity of economy which his guardians had tried to impose upon him when they fixed his allowance at only 100*l.* a year. That had been evaded, he tells us, by the relenting of his Jewish friend in London, who did at last advance him the sum for which there had been so much negotiation. He could thus afford himself all that was needed to make Oxford studentship fairly comfortable, including books, a run to London now and then, and a visit, in vacation-time, to friends in Liverpool or elsewhere.

The lessons from the German Schwartzburg were of some consequence. They were not in Hebrew merely. Though he had received some general notions of German Literature, and especially some tempting information about Jean Paul Richter, Hippel, Hamann, and other little-known German writers, from an accomplished young German named De Haren, with whom he had formed a friendship in his Welsh wanderings, it was at Oxford, and under Schwartzburg, that he first set himself seriously to the study of German. The German Philosophy, as well as the German Literature, attracted him thenceforward.

Of even greater importance was the systematic attention he now began to bestow on English Literature. Though from his childhood his sensibilities had been powerfully affected by "the greatness of our own literature," and though his readings in English poets and prose writers had been extensive and varied, it was at Oxford that he first felt the necessity of organizing his knowledge of English Literature, and regarding it no longer as a mere splendid phenomenon or sky of so many hundreds of scattered stars of different degrees of brilliancy, but as a vast and vital whole that could be grasped in a history. Thence-

forward, while Chaucer, Spenser, Shakspeare, Bacon, Milton, Sir Thomas Browne, Jeremy Taylor, and others of his favourites among the older writers, were dearer and more distinct to him than ever individually, he could contemplate that great flow of the national thought through successive centuries, which, though it seemed to eddy round those individualities as so many independent and inserted marvels, had really caused them and stationed them where they were, and which, after its farther, and in his eyes less interesting, course through the eighteenth century, was now again becoming glorious in Wordsworth and his disciples. It was on this last portion of the long history of English Literature, the portion contemporary with himself, that De Quincey fastened his regard with the enthusiasm of a personal concern. He had by this time put himself in correspondence with Wordsworth, expressing his admiration and indebtedness, and had received at least two letters of reply, intimating that the poet was not indifferent to the recognition of such a hopeful young admirer, and would be glad to see him at a convenient opportunity. More recently he had been making inquiries after Coleridge, whom he had known first by his *Ancient Mariner*, published with Wordsworth's *Lyrical Ballads* in 1798, but to whom he was now drawn also by interest in his prose writings. As De Quincey had already concluded with himself that it would never be in the element of verse that his own genius could accomplish anything considerable in literature, if he should ever accomplish anything at all, the fact that Coleridge was a prose writer and philosopher, as well as a poet, seems to have whetted the desire for an immediate meeting with him, if only in preparation for the more formidable and less accessible Wordsworth. He was, therefore, much disappointed at finding, in 1805, that

Coleridge had left the Lakes, and had gone to Malta as Secretary to Sir Alexander Ball, the Governor of that island.

One other fact of De Quincey's days of Oxford studentship is expressly recorded by himself. It was then that he first began to take opium. His first experience of the drug was on a dull, rainy Sunday in the spring or autumn of 1804, when, being on one of his visits to London, and having suffered for a week or two from neuralgia, he took the advice of a friend and purchased a phial of the tincture of opium at a druggist's shop in Oxford Street, near "the stately Pantheon." The effect, when he took the first dose in his lodgings, was divine; and from that moment De Quincey was an experimenter in opium—never without a supply of the drug beside him in one or other of its forms, whether in the solid cakes or sticks of the dried substance, as imported from Turkey, Egypt, Persia, or India, or in the prepared red-brown liquid known as laudanum. Nay, more, from that moment he was the apologist for opium, skilled, or fancying himself skilled, in all its effects, and distinguishing its negative effects in the mere relief of pain from its positive effects as an intellectual stimulant and exhilarant. He suggests, indeed, that in continuing the use of the drug after its first service to him in an attack of neuralgia, he had hit by blind instinct on the specific for the pulmonary consumption to which he was liable by inheritance from his father. The reports of medical authorities, from an investigation of all the evidence, are rather to the effect that the constitutional disease from which he suffered was a slow or intermittent ulceration of the stomach, brought on, perhaps, by bad and insufficient food during his time of vagrancy in Wales and London, and that his perseverance in the use of opium was

due originally to his accidental experience of its effects in allaying those "gnawing pains in the stomach" of which, from that time of his vagrancy, he complained always or periodically. Enough of a disagreeable subject. What concerns us at present is, that De Quincey avers most solemnly that, though he took opium at Oxford from 1804 onwards, it was still in such moderation that he could have broken off the habit. He was not yet, nor for some years to come, a slave to opium, but confined himself to a carefully precalculated opium-debauch, as he calls it, about once in three weeks. The probability is that the indulgence added to his queerness among the Oxonians, his liking for solitary reverie, and his carelessness of academic routine and distinction.

De Quincey, it seems, did go up for his written examination for the degree of B.A. The fact is attested by one of his old school-fellows at Winkfield, who had gone to Lincoln College while De Quincey was in residence in Worcester College. Dr. Goodenough, of Christ Church, says this authority, was wonderfully struck with De Quincey's performance, and told the Worcester College people that they had sent up the cleverest man he had ever encountered, and that, if he did as well in his *viva voce* as he had done on paper, he would carry all before him. But De Quincey, in a fit of shyness, or having taken some offence, never presented himself for his *viva voce*, remained without his degree, and, indeed, disappeared from Oxford for some time. The date is not given, but it seems to have been in 1807. His name remained on the books of his college till 1810; but, as we have his own distinct statement that his time of residence was from 1803 to 1808, we have to suppose only a year of effective connexion with the University after 1807, and that broken by absences.

He liked to be in London, where he now counted Charles Lamb in the number of his acquaintances, and where he delighted in going to the Opera to hear Grassini sing, and in rambling among the markets on Saturday nights; and he had entered himself, or was about to enter himself, as a member of the Middle Temple, with a view to eating his terms for the Bar. His mother meanwhile having shifted her domicile from Chester to a house and estate called Westhay, in Somersetshire, about twelve miles from Bristol, which had been purchased for her by her Indian brother at a cost of 12,000*l.*, there were visits also to that part of the West of England, with renewed confabulations with Hannah More and her set. What is of especial importance in De Quincey's biography, however, at this time of the close of his residence at Oxford, is that he is found then indubitably in possession of a good deal of money. How this had come about we are not informed; but, as he had attained his majority in 1806, we are to fancy either that he had then been put at comparative ease by becoming master of his own funds, or that there had been some new and enlarged transaction with the Jews, converting the whole futurity of those funds into a present capital. As De Quincey speaks of his transactions with the Jews as pretty continuous, or as repeated from time to time, in his earlier life, the latter supposition is likely enough.

The improvement of De Quincey's pecuniary circumstances in and from the year 1807 connects itself more particularly with one interesting absence of his from Oxford in the latter half of that year. Having gone into Somersetshire in the course of the summer, and having heard that Coleridge had returned from abroad, and was then quartered among friends at Nether Stowey, in that county, he went in search of the great man. He did not

find him at Nether Stowey, but came upon him in the town of Bridgewater, where he was staying, with his wife and his three young children, Hartley, Derwent, and Sara, in the house of a certain family of Chubbs, well-to-do descendants of Chubb the Deist. It was a memorable meeting. The "noticeable man with large grey eyes," now not more than thirty-five years of age, but, as De Quincey observed, with flabby and unhealthy white cheeks and confused and abstracted gait, received his young visitor very courteously, and had several conversations with him, by himself and in company. Though the elder opium-eater and the younger opium-eater were thus together, no confidences were exchanged on that subject, save that once, when laudanum was casually mentioned by De Quincey, it was with an emphasis of horror that Coleridge warned him to have nothing to do with that drug. The talk, or rather Coleridge's monologue, was on all things and sundry, and De Quincey was amazed, even beyond expectation, by its range and gorgeousness. His veneration for Coleridge became a kind of filial affection; and when, a few weeks after, Coleridge went with his family to Bristol, and their acquaintance was renewed there, it was with delight that De Quincey found he could do the sage a slight piece of service. Mrs. Coleridge and the children were bound for the Lakes, to be domiciled, as before, with Southey, at Greta Hall, Keswick; but, as Coleridge was arranging for a course of lectures on Poetry and the Fine Arts, to be delivered at the Royal Institution, in Albemarle Street, London, he could not accompany them. De Quincey offered to be their escort; and in October, 1807, the party set out from Bristol by post-chaise. Travelling by stages, and with some little stay at Liverpool, they reached the Lake Country by a route which

required them to take Wordsworth's cottage at Grasmere as their resting-place before going on to Southey's, at Keswick. Twice had De Quincey been on the verge of this poetic paradise before, but both times he had retreated with a nervous shrinking at the last moment from the idea of presenting himself to Wordsworth. Now, however, in his character of convoy to Mrs. Coleridge, rather than in that of Wordsworth's occasional correspondent in past years, he did behold the epoch-making man, received a grasp of welcome from his hand at his own door, and became his temporary guest. For two days he was in the cottage, along with Mrs. Coleridge and her children, happy in the society of Wordsworth, his wife, and his sister Dorothy, and making his observations of the three; and on the third day there began that excursion of all the seniors of the party over the hills in a cart, which, while it deposited Mrs. Coleridge at her destination in Southey's house, gave De Quincey his first introduction also to that other famous Lakist. All this was in November, 1807; before the end of which month De Quincey was back in Bristol, to hear of the completion of another piece of kindness he had been meditating for Coleridge. The profound dejection of Coleridge, the state of "cheerless despondency" into which he had fallen, and out of which his splendid talks were evidently but leaps and refuges of despair, had struck his young friend; and, having ascertained by inquiries that the main immediate cause was hopeless distress in money matters, De Quincey had been in private communication with Cottle, the Bristol bookseller, on the subject. He wanted to give Coleridge 500*l.*, a sum which all Cottle's representations, with questions whether he was serious, whether he could afford it, whether he was of age, &c., could not persuade him to reduce below 300*l.* That

sum Coleridge did accept, having been told nothing more by Cottle at the time than that "a young man of fortune who admired his talents" wanted to make him a present. Coleridge's formal receipt for the money, which the bookseller thought it right to take for his own exoneration, is dated November 12, 1807.

Though De Quincey includes the year 1808 in the time of his Oxford residence, the records show him to have been much in London through parts of that year. Coleridge was one of his attractions. He heard some of the sage's lectures at the Royal Institution, and regretted that, from Coleridge's own carelessness in preparation and the wretched state of his health, they were so nearly a breakdown; he saw much of Coleridge in his uncomfortable temporary chambers in the office of the *Courier* newspaper, in the Strand; and in his calls on Coleridge at these chambers he met Sir Humphry Davy, Godwin, and other new faces. Later in the year he is found still, or again, in London, in lodgings in Titchfield Street and Northumberland Street, Marylebone, eating his terms, one has to suppose, and seeing Lamb and Hazlitt, and sauntering at nights among the markets, and not failing at the Opera for many nights in succession. In November of the same year he paid a second visit to Wordsworth at the Lakes; and he remained there till February, 1809, when he returned to London. Wordsworth, at the time of this second visit of De Quincey, had been busy with that series of political letters in the *Courier* newspaper which he converted into more complete form in his pamphlet, published May, 1809, *Concerning the Relations of Great Britain, Spain, and Portugal, as affected by the Convention of Cintra*. It was De Quincey, after his return to London, who saw this pamphlet through the press, adding an appendix of notes,

which Wordsworth described as "done in a masterly manner." The service was gratefully acknowledged also by Wordsworth's sister, Dorothy. A letter of hers is extant in which she thanks De Quincey warmly for having saved her brother so much anxiety, says he had been a treasure to them both, and hopes that he may soon be at Grasmere to refresh himself after the troubles of his task.

Dorothy Wordsworth's hope in this letter points to an arrangement of some importance that had been come to between De Quincey and the Wordsworths. This was that De Quincey should leave London, Oxford, and all his other troublesome entanglements in the South, and should come to reside permanently at the Lakes, as the tenant of the very cottage in which Wordsworth had lived from 1799 to 1807, but which he had recently quitted for the somewhat larger house, called Allan Bank, about a mile distant. Through the latter months of 1809 the talk among the inhabitants of the quiet valley of Grasmere was of the young gentleman who was coming to live among them in Mr. Wordsworth's old cottage, and of Miss Wordsworth's careful activity in ordering carpets and other furnishings, and getting the cottage ready for his arrival.

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CHAPTER V.

BACHELOR LIFE AT THE LAKES.

[1809-1816.]

IN November, 1809, De Quincey, at the age of twenty-four, took possession of his pretty cottage at Townend, Grasmere, and became one of the so-called Lakists. For seven-and-twenty years this cottage was to be in his tenancy, and for more than twenty of these it was to be his head-quarters and nominal home, the place where he resided constantly when he was at rest, or to which he always returned from any of his frequent divagations.

Strange that a district of England which had been sleeping unknown in its native beauties and grandeurs from time immemorial, over whose mountains the snow had come and gone silently for a thousand winters, and whose valleys had laughed again in equal privacy into shower and sunshine through the thousand alternating summers, should have been suddenly evoked into celebrity by the genius of one man. But so it had happened. Wordsworth was making the Lake District, and the call had gone forth to come and behold it. Ho! all ye that are tourists and in quest of the picturesque, try this district in the proper season; all ye that have made a little money, and desire to settle somewhere in peace and meditative comfort, for the rest of your lives, examine these valleys and the skirts of these lakes for the suitable spots; all ye that

are sons of the muses in the higher sense, not tied by hard necessity to the vicinity of a printing-press in London, or Edinburgh, or any other city, but at liberty to select an abode where you may possess your souls in quiet and combine high thinking with plain living—Mr. Wordsworth uses and recommends no beverages stronger than milk or tea; but stronger may be imported if indispensable, and there are inns on the roads—come and have cottages here, and spend hours every day in the open air, communing with Nature herself, as she is to be found, pure and unsophisticated, in Cumberland and Westmoreland scenery! By the year 1809 the response had been considerable. Tourists had been becoming numerous enough to suggest to Wordsworth the rudiments of what afterwards took form as his *Guide to the Lakes*; new residents from among the class of retired business men were appearing by degrees; and, though fewer sons of the muses were in circumstances to accept the invitation than might have liked to do so, a sprinkling of such was to be counted.

Wordsworth himself, now in his fortieth year, and settled at Grasmere since 1799, had just, as we have seen, migrated from his previous cottage to Allan Bank, only a mile distant, which was to be his residence till the spring of 1811, when he transferred himself to Grasmere Parsonage, there to remain till 1813, when he removed to his final and most famous residence of Rydal Mount. Southey, the industrious Southey, four years younger than Wordsworth, had been established for some years at Greta Hall, Keswick, in the Cumberland portion of the Lake District, and at least thirteen miles from Wordsworth. It was a convenient distance between two men whose mutual respect obliged them to occasional intercourse, but whose styles of genius and habits of literary work were so differ-

ent as to cause some degree of mutual repulsion. Coleridge, Southey's brother-in-law, who had been a Lakist in previous years, and quartered for some time, with his family, in Southey's house, had, as we have seen, broken away from the Lakes for a while, gone abroad, gone to Somersetshire, but again gravitated to the mill-horse round of London. Having sent his wife and children back to Southey's, however, he had at length followed them himself, to try the Lakes once more; and, from late in 1809 to the middle of 1810, Coleridge was to be again a denizen of the district, moving between Southey's at Keswick and Wordsworth's at Grasmere, but on the whole preferring to be with Wordsworth. Here, through that time, he was to be engaged in bringing out his periodical called *The Friend*, which was printed at Penrith, and the bad management of which was to bring the whole concern to bankruptcy in the twenty-ninth number. Three other literary notabilities of the Lake District, at the time of De Quincey's advent there, deserve especial mention. One was Dr. Richard Watson, Bishop of Llandaff, now seventy-two years of age, but with seven years of life still before him, living at his mansion of Calgarth Park, on Windermere, eight miles south from Grasmere, and altogether the leading personage in the society of the region, from his ecclesiastical rank and great wealth, his hospitality and conversational ability, and the recollection of his extraordinary series of publications. A much humbler man, but loved beyond expression by all his intimate friends, was Charles Lloyd, living at Brathay, about half-way between Calgarth and Grasmere, originally a Quaker, but now a kind of Lakist Rousseau, revealing philosophic powers that had not been guessed from his published poems. The time was yet some years distant when this fine intellect, overclouded by a growing lunacy,

was to be withdrawn from Brathay to die abroad. Finally, a recent comer into the Lake District, proprietor since 1807 of Elleray, also on Windermere, about a mile from Calgarth, was a young Scoto-Oxonian of whom the world was to hear more than of either Bishop Watson or Charles Lloyd. This was John Wilson, afterwards known as Professor Wilson and "Christopher North." He was almost exactly of De Quincey's own age, or but three months older; but what a contrast between them physically!—De Quincey one of the smallest and feeblest-looking of mortals, hardly more than five feet high, while Wilson was one of the most magnificent young athletes that ever attracted men's or women's eyes in street or on heather. His stature close on six feet, his frame proportioned into the very ideal of a Hercules-Apollo of the Scandinavian or yellow-haired type, masking immensity of strength under the litheness of a leopard, he carried also one of the noblest and most poetic of heads ever set on beautifully square human shoulders. Then, what a reputation he had brought with him from Oxford, where, strangely enough, he had been a gentleman-commoner of Magdalen College all the time of De Quincey's residence in the University, though they had never then met! While De Quincey had been creeping through the University, a bookish, opium-eating recluse, Wilson had been the most observed man of all the colleges, not more for his magnificent physique and his unapproachable applications of it in pugilistic matches, leaping matches, and all other kinds of University sports, than for his universal sociability, exuberance of humour, easy triumphs in the classics and whatever else he cared to compete in, and promises of some unusual form of literary effulgence not yet distinctly featured. With this kind of reputation preceding him from Oxford, it was as if he had

bounded into the Lake District, rather than merely settled in it; and already the splendid young Mr. Wilson of Elleray, to whom his father, a Paisley manufacturer, had left a clear fortune of 50,000*l.*, was known not only to all his neighbours that were likely to think of that matter, but also to every boatman, every innkeeper, every crack wrestler or boxer, every band of gipsies or other vagrants, over the whole region.

In this mere enumeration there is already implied a good deal of De Quincey's life through the six or seven years at present under notice. The mile of road from his own cottage to Wordsworth's house of Allan Bank was his familiar walk morning and evening from the first, for the sake of Wordsworth's society, and also of Coleridge's, so long as Coleridge, busy in bringing out his *Friend*, remained Wordsworth's guest. As many as five hundred books at a time from the very considerable library which De Quincey had in his cottage, a large portion of it consisting of German books, would, he tells us, be in Wordsworth's house in those days for Coleridge's use—Wordsworth's own library being the most wretched thing that ever went by that name, a mere litter of tattered odd volumes on a few shelves. The distance from Southey, whose library was the chief distinction of his house, prevented such frequent intercourse with him as with the Wordsworths; nor was De Quincey ever bound to Southey by any very close intimacy. He did occasionally visit at Greta Hall, however, and was able, "in a qualified sense," to call Southey his friend; and we find Southey, in a letter to a correspondent in 1810, making mention of De Quincey in rather memorable terms. "De Quincey," he says, "is a singular man, but better informed than any person almost that I ever met at his age." That De Quincey was among the numer-

ous visitors of the great Bishop Watson at Calgarth Park, and thus came to know that celebrity personally, is no mere guess. "This dignitary," he tells us, "I knew myself as much as I wished to know him: he *was* interesting, yet also *not* interesting;" and he goes on to sketch for us his portrait of the somewhat pompous and worldly, yet kindly, jovial, candid, and strong-headed septuagenarian, whom, pluralist and sinecurist though he had been all his life, and all but avowedly at his own table a Socinian and free-thinker, the Whigs had wished to make Archbishop of York. At Brathay, De Quincey was a constant visitor, sometimes in solitary conversation for hours with the philosophic Charles Lloyd himself, sometimes at one of Lloyd's well-attended dinner parties, sometimes looking on at one of those evening parties of young people that Lloyd liked to see gathered at his house. It had been at one of these evening parties at Lloyd's, apparently in the year 1808, that De Quincey had first seen Wilson—dancing radiantly and indefatigably, and chiefly with a Miss Jane Penny, "the leading belle of the Lake Country;" but it was in Wordsworth's house that the first formal introduction took place. It was Wordsworth himself, when De Quincey entered his room one morning and found a stranger with him, that pronounced the words of introduction, "*Mr. Wilson of Elleray*," in his usual deep tones. From the time of this introduction the two were fast friends, some unusually strong elective affinity attaching the magnificent master of Elleray to his puny neighbour. There was talk between them of a tour together to Spain, the Mediterranean, and the East; and, though that came to nothing, they contrived to be together as much as possible, whenever Wilson was at Elleray, and not, as happened pretty often, away in Edinburgh on the business of his nominal prepa-

ration for the Scottish Bar. It must have been a sight to see the two together in one of Wilson's fishing expeditions among the Lakes, or in their joint rambles over the hills, the little De Quincey trudging side by side with his majestic comrade. But De Quincey was a capital walker—never satisfied without his ten or fifteen miles daily in the open air. Even in that matter, therefore, he and Wilson were well enough matched; while it may be doubted whether in the subtle, scholarly, whimsical, and deeply reasoned bits of brain-product which the smaller man gave to the larger in the course of their walks, in exchange for the laughs and wild, immethodic chaunts which prophesied the future Christopher, the larger man may not have had the better bargain. When Wilson was not at Elleray, or even when he was there, De Quincey delighted much in long, aimless walks by himself, especially nocturnal walks.

More and more, it seems, after 1810, when Coleridge took his final departure from the Lakes, there had been a gradual waning of the friendship between De Quincey and Wordsworth. They were still much together; Wordsworth still consulted De Quincey about his poems, or lines in his poems; and De Quincey's admiration of the hero in his poetic character remained unabated. But, whether because Wordsworth, in his self-absorption, found De Quincey's companionship unnecessary, or because De Quincey felt his nerves jarred by Wordsworth's habitual austerity and masculine hardness, certain it is that there came at length to be some degree of mutual alienation. This was recompensed in part by the fidelity of Dorothy Wordsworth's liking for De Quincey and by the growing attachment to him of Wordsworth's children. The Wordsworth children were never tired of talking of "Kinsey" and the presents he brought them. "Kinsey! Kinsey!

what a' bring Katy from London?" were the parting words of one of them, his favourite little Kate Wordsworth, as he was going away for a while. He remembered the words, and quoted them in a letter which he wrote to Dorothy Wordsworth on hearing of the young thing's death in his absence, June 4th, 1812. His grief over the death of this child passed all that is common in that kind of experience.

Only a part of the life of a man, even at the Lakes, can consist in walks and talks out-of-doors with friends, or in visits to the houses of neighbours. Much of it, all the best of it, must consist in what he does by himself within the four walls that enclose him when he is not dependent on others. Have we any glimpse of De Quincey and his occupations in his solitary bachelorhood in his pretty rose-embowered cottage at Grasmere? We have; and it ought to be quoted. It is the passage where, overleaping the interval from his Oxford life, he presents himself as he was in 1812, two hundred and fifty miles away from Oxford, and buried among mountains:

"And what am I doing amongst the mountains? Taking opium. Yes; but what else? Why, reader, in 1812, the year we are now arrived at, as well as for some years previous, I have been chiefly studying German metaphysics, or the writings of Kant, Fichte, Schelling, &c. And how, and in what manner do I live? in short, what class or description of men do I belong to? I am at this period—viz., in 1812—living in a cottage; and with a single female servant (*honi soit qui mal y pense*), who, amongst my neighbours, passes by the name of my 'house-keeper.' And, as a scholar and a man of learned education, I may presume to class myself as an unworthy member of that indefinite body called *gentlemen*. Partly on the ground I have assigned—partly because, from having no visible calling or business, it is rightly judged that I must be living on my private fortune—I am so classed by my neighbours; and, by the

courtesy of modern England, I am usually addressed on letters, &c., *Esquire*. . . Am I married? Not yet. And I still take opium? On Saturday nights. And, perhaps, have taken it unblushingly ever since 'the rainy Sunday,' and 'the stately Pantheon,' and 'the beatific druggist' of 1804? Even so. And how do I find my health after all this opium-eating? in short, how do I do? Why, pretty well, I thank you, reader. In fact, if I dared to say the real and simple truth (though, in order to satisfy the theories of some medical men, I ought to be ill), I was never better in my life than in the spring of 1812; and I hope sincerely that the quantity of claret, port, or 'London particular Madeira,' which, in all probability, you, good reader, have taken, and design to take, for every term of eight years during your natural life, may as little disorder your health as mine was disordered by all the opium I had taken (though in quantity such that I might well have bathed and swum in it) for the eight years between 1804 and 1812."

Translated into stricter biographical language, this means, in the first place, that De Quincey had been a hard student during his residence at the Lakes, burning the midnight oil a good deal over his books of all sorts, but especially over the later German transcendentalists. Nothing is said of that other exercise which is the sole salvation of any man situated as De Quincey was, and without which reading and reverie are but an Epicurean waste of spirit—actual *production* of some kind or other, by a wide-awake exertion of one's own faculties, out of the stuff of one's readings and reveries. We may, however, if we choose, suppose piles of papers on his table, if only in the form of abstracts of the books read, and comments and criticisms on them for his own edification. Of this we are less certain than of the other fact of which the extract assures us. He had brought the habit of opium-taking to the Lakes with him; and an indispensable article on his table, on one night of the week at least, when he was seated by himself, and the shutters were

shut, and the candles lit, and the fire burning brightly, was the opium decanter!

De Quincey's intimations on this subject are perfectly plain. Through the eight years preceding 1812 he had, he says, persisted uninterruptedly in the use of opium, with a gradual increase both in the frequency of his doses and of the quantity of each, but still—so he could flatter himself—with no signs of permanent injury. But, within a year, he goes on to say, the case was altered. The year 1813, he intimates, was a fatal one in his history. There had been some calamity of a private kind, causing him great distress. What it was he does not say; but it seems to have been some serious catastrophe in his pecuniary affairs. This may be inferred from a letter to him from his uncle, Colonel Penson, sent from Fennyngur, in India, and dated 16th July, 1813. "I have heard that your affairs are not prosperous," the letter begins, "though of the nature or extent of your misfortunes I have no information. Yet, as it has pleased God to bless me beyond either hope or expectation since I left England, I feel that in requesting your acceptance of the enclosed I am not violating," &c. What the good uncle enclosed was a handsome draft for his nephew's help. It may have been to the same unfortunate crisis in De Quincey's affairs that there had been reference in a note sent him by Wordsworth some months before, when he was away on one of his rambles from Grasmere. The main purpose was to inform him of the death of another of Wordsworth's children, little Tommy, who had been a pet of De Quincey's; but the note ends, "Most tenderly and lovingly, with heavy sorrow for you, my dear friend, I remain yours, W. WORDSWORTH." Whether the calamity was of the kind here suggested or not, it had very im-

portant effects on De Quincey's health, and, through them, on his dealings with opium. "I was attacked," he says, "by a most appalling irritation of the stomach, in all respects the same as that which had caused me so much suffering in youth, and accompanied by a revival of the old dreams. Now, then, it was—viz., in the year 1813—that I became a regular and confirmed (no longer an intermitting) opium-eater." He explains what he means by informing us that from this time the use of the drug increased and increased upon him till it reached the monstrous allowance of 320 grains of solid opium, or 8000 drops of laudanum, per day. It may convey a more exact idea if we add that 8000 drops would fill about seven ordinary wine-glasses.

That this exchange of the practice of a periodical or intermittent opium-debauch for the character of a confirmed and daily opium-eater was accompanied by some speedy experience of those opium-horrors of which he has left us such vivid descriptions, may be taken for granted. It is to a later period, however, that he refers his full experience of those opium-horrors; and what we should gather from his brief accounts of himself for the year or two immediately following 1813 is rather that he was not yet in the stage of that most awful experience of the effects of opium, but simply under an increasing cloud of gloom, with a torpor of the intellectual faculties. The recorded incidents of those years are very few, and relate chiefly to some rambles away from the Lakes. Several times, as we are told, he was in London; and every year, it appears, he was for some time in Somersetshire or elsewhere in the West of England, visiting his mother and her friends. It was in one of those visits to Somersetshire, in 1814, and at Hannah More's house, that he met

Mrs. Siddons, then retiring from the stage in her fifty-ninth year, and was amused by an animated debate which he heard between the two ladies on the points of Calvinism, till Hannah More's lady-like tact changed the subject and wiled Mrs. Siddons into her charming recollections of Johnson and Garrick. But a more memorable visit than any to Somersetshire was that which he paid to Edinburgh, for the first time, in the winter of 1814-'15.

Wilson, who had been a married man since 1811, when the fore-mentioned Miss Jane Penny, the belle of the Lake District, became his wife, had been coming and going as before between Edinburgh and Ellera. He had also published his *Isle of Palms* and other poems; he was about to be called to the Edinburgh Bar; and, being still in the enjoyment of his large patrimonial fortune, though very soon to lose it by the misconduct of a relative, he was now, in his thirtieth year, a shining figure in Edinburgh society. Twice or thrice he had tried to bring De Quincey with him from the Lakes; but not till now had he succeeded. The months of the winter of 1814-'15 which De Quincey did spend in Edinburgh were a subject of brilliant recollection long afterwards. Of Scott and Jeffrey he seems to have seen nothing, or nothing more than their physiognomies in the streets or the Parliament House; but the group of less-known but rising men that was gathered round Wilson and his brothers, forming the Young Edinburgh of that date, was sufficiently interesting in itself. There was Sir William Hamilton, in his twenty-seventh year, already nominally a Scottish advocate, but really an omnivorous scholar, and, as the world came in time to know, the nearest approach to an Aristotle *redivivus* in the British Logic and Metaphysics of his generation. There was Sir William's younger

brother, Thomas Hamilton, known afterwards as the author of *Cyril Thornton*, a novel of considerable merit. There was Scott's friend, William Allan, the painter, afterwards Sir William Allan, and President of the Royal Scottish Academy. There was a certain Robert Pierce Gillies, of the Scottish Bar, more of an invalid than the rest of the group, but versatile in literature, full of literary gossip, and noted in those days for the "all but princely" style of his hospitalities. Finally, not to mention others then walking the Parliament House as budding barristers, afterwards to be judges or big-wigs of some kind, there was John Gibson Lockhart, yet only in his twenty-first year, and not to be called to the Bar till two years hence, but already beginning to be recognised on the verge of the Young Edinburgh set for his literary promise and his scorpion readiness in sting and caricature. In the circle of these, with Wilson's house as the centre, De Quincey moved during his stay in Edinburgh, welcome among them from the first, and leaving among them no ordinary impression. Mr. R. P. Gillies has commemorated particularly the effects of his conversation. "The talk might be of 'beeves,' and he could grapple with them, if expected to do so; but his musical cadences were not in keeping with such work, and in a few minutes (not without some strictly logical sequence) he would escape at will from beeves to butterflies, and thence to the soul's immortality, to Plato, and Kant, and Schelling, and Fichte, to Milton's early years and Shakspeare's Sonnets, to Wordsworth and Coleridge, to Homer and Æschylus, to St. Thomas of Aquin, St. Basil, and St. Chrysostom." As yet, it is to be remembered, De Quincey had not published a line of his own.

For incidents in De Quincey's bachelor life at the Lakes

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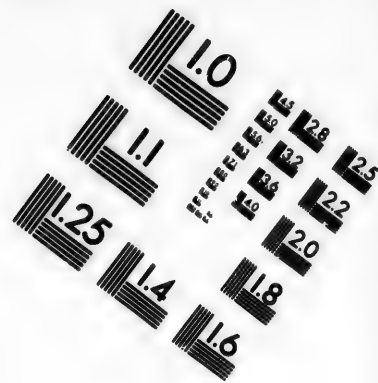
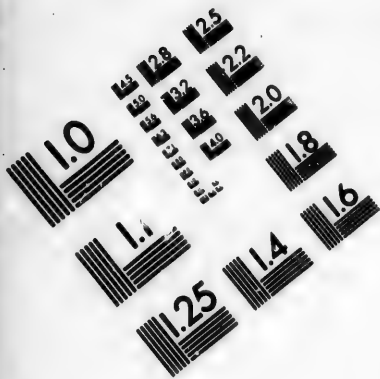
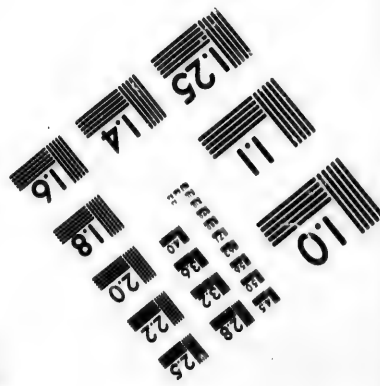
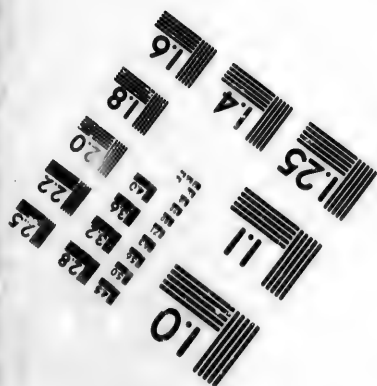
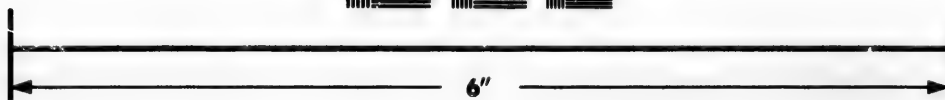
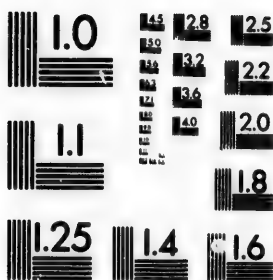


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after his return from Edinburgh we search in vain, unless we may count among them his famous, but undated, adventure with the Malay. He was sitting in his room in his cottage one day when he was informed that there was a strange, dark man in the kitchen. Going to the rescue of the alarmed girl who had admitted the man, he found him to be a poor Malay tramp, in a turban and dingy white trousers, whom some accident had brought into those parts. He had some food and rest, and, at his departure, De Quincey, who could not understand a word he said, but guessed that as an Asiatic he might be no stranger to opium, presented him with some. The Malay, after looking at the piece given him, "enough to kill some half-dozen dragoons together with their horses," immediately bolted the whole at one mouthful. De Quincey felt anxious for some days; but, as he never heard that a dead Malay had been found on the roads thereabouts, he became satisfied that no harm had been done.

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CHAPTER VI.

MARRIED LIFE AT THE LAKES.—PROSTRATION UNDER
OPIUM.—PROVINCIAL EDITORSHIP.

[1816-1821.]

WE have had a picture from De Quincey himself of his life in his cottage at Grasmere in the year 1812. Here is a companion picture, also by himself, of his life in the same cottage in 1816-'17:

"Let there be a cottage, standing in a valley, eighteen miles from any town; no spacious valley, but about two miles long by three-quarters of a mile in average width—the benefit of which provision is that all families resident within its circuit will comprise, as it were, one larger household, personally familiar to your eye, and more or less interesting to your affections. Let the mountains be real mountains, between 3000 and 4000 feet high, and the cottage a real cottage, not (as a witty author has it) 'a cottage with a double coach-house;' let it be, in fact (for I must abide by the actual scene), a white cottage, embowered with flowering shrubs, so chosen as to unfold a succession of flowers upon the walls, and clustering around the windows, through all the months of spring, summer, and autumn, beginning, in fact, with May roses, and ending with jasmine. Let it, however, *not* be spring, nor summer, nor autumn, but winter in its sternest shape. . . . But here, to save myself the trouble of too much verbal description, I will introduce a painter, and give him directions for the rest of the picture. Painters do not like white cottages, unless a good deal weather-stained; but, as the reader now understands that it is a winter night, his services will not be required except for the *inside* of the house.—Paint me, then, a room seventeen feet by

twelve, and not more than seven and a half feet high. This, reader, is somewhat ambitiously styled, in my family, the drawing-room; but, being contrived 'a double debt to pay,' it is also, and more justly, termed the library, for it happens that books are the only article of property in which I am richer than my neighbours. Of these I have about 5000, collected gradually since my eighteenth year. Therefore, painter, put as many as you can into this room. Make it populous with books; and, furthermore, paint me a good fire, and furniture plain and modest, befitting the unpretending cottage of a scholar. And near the fire paint me a tea-table; and (as it is clear that no creature can come to see me on such a stormy night) place only two cups and saucers on the tea-tray; and, if you know how to paint such a thing, symbolically or otherwise, paint me an eternal teapot—eternal *a parte ante* and *a parte post*; for I usually drink tea from eight o'clock at night to four in the morning. And, as it is very unpleasant to make tea, or to pour it out, for one's self, paint me a lovely young woman sitting at the table. Paint her arms like Aurora's, and her smiles like Hebe's; but no, dear M——! not even in jest let me insinuate that thy power to illuminate my cottage rests upon a tenure so perishable as mere personal beauty, or that the witchcraft of angelic smiles lies within the empire of any earthly pencil. Pass, then, my good painter, to something more within its power; and the next article brought forward should naturally be myself—a picture of the Opium-eater, with his 'little golden receptacle of the pernicious drug' lying beside him on the table. As to the opium, I have no objection to see a picture of *that*; you may paint it, if you choose; but I apprise you that no 'little' receptacle would, even in 1816, answer *my* purpose, who was at a distance from the 'stately Pantheon' and all druggists (mortal or otherwise). No: you may as well paint the real receptacle, which was not of gold, but of glass, and as much like a sublunary wine-decanter as possible. In fact, one day, by a series of happily conceived experiments, I discovered that it *was* a decanter. Into this you may put a quart of ruby-coloured laudanum; that, and a book of German metaphysics placed by its side, will sufficiently attest my being in the neighbourhood."

The fair tea-maker of this passage, styled "dear M——," was De Quincey's wife, whom he married in the end of 1816. She was a Margaret Simpson, daughter

of a small Westmoreland farmer, living at a place called "The Nab," near De Quincey's cottage, and sometimes confounded now with that cottage by tourists, the rather because De Quincey alternated a good deal between the two after his marriage. At the date of the marriage the bride was eighteen years of age, De Quincey being thirty-one. For a while before the event, and in anticipation of it, De Quincey had, as he tells us, "suddenly and without any considerable effort," reduced his daily allowance of opium from 320 grains, or 8000 drops, to 40 grains, or 1000 drops. The effect had been magical. The "cloud of profoundest melancholy" which had rested on his brain passed away; his mind could think as healthily as ever before; he could read Kant again, or any other hard writer, with clear intelligence. And so for a while after the marriage, till he could count about a year altogether of parenthetic peace and happiness in this portion of his life. "It was a year of brilliant water (to speak after the manner of jewellers), set, as it were, and insulated, in the gloomy umbrage of opium." For, as he goes on to inform us, his restriction of himself to the diminished allowance was but temporary; and from some time in 1817, on through 1818, and even into 1819, he was again under the full dominion of the fell agent, rising once more to his 8000 drops *per diem*, or even sometimes to 12,000 drops. This, accordingly, was the time of that most intimate and tremendous experience of the opium-horrors in his own case which he has described in part of his *Confessions*.

His description fully bears out the accepted belief, confirmed so strikingly by the similar case of Coleridge, that one inevitable effect of opium-eating is paralysis of the will. With his intellectual apprehensions of duty as

keen as ever, he could propose or execute nothing; he was as powerless as an infant for any practical effort. Everything was neglected or procrastinated; the domestic economy, so far as it depended on himself, might have gone to wreck; letters, however urgent, lay about unanswered. Further, there was a paralysis of that very physical craving which, if gratified, might have furnished so far a counteractive to the opium. While he had always before needed and liked long walks, and while his sole chance now lay in enormous exercise of that kind, he sank into a state of hopeless sedentariness. Add to all this the protracted, ever-varying, never-ceasing nightmare of his opium-dreams. On this subject he has left us many pages, blending records of his own dreams with such a science or philosophy of opium-dreaming in general as perhaps no other man ever attempted. Biographically, the following is the substance: That faculty of day-dreaming, of projecting optical images or fancies out of one's own mind into the air, which is constitutionally strong in some, and which had been unusually strong in De Quincey from his infancy, was now intensified by his opium-eating into an ungovernable propensity. Especially at night, as he lay awake in bed, his thoughts translated themselves into visions which could not be dismissed, or visions would come of themselves, in the form of "vast processions" and "friezes of never-ending stories" painted on the darkness. This morbid activity of the faculty of visual creation pursued him into sleep. It seemed as if a theatre were "suddenly opened and lighted up" within his brain, for the performance, regularly as sleep came, of nightly extravaganzas and phantasmagories. What had troubled the phantasy already by day would re-appear in the night with wonderful trans-

mutations and expansions, or any subject that had been thought of by day would present itself at night in amazing dream-scenery and allegory. But, on the whole, the resources of material for the repeated nightly pageant seemed boundless. What should come, or whence it came, was incalculable. It was as if among the specific potencies of opium was that of searching out whatever was stored up and dormant anyhow in the most secret intricacies of the nervous organism, unlocking all doors, compelling all the hoarded photographic impressions of all that had happened in the life of a human being from the hour of birth to yesterday, all that had gone into oblivion with himself and was known to God only, to flash out again, and become real and significant once more in the dreamy revel. But it was also as if, with all this recovery of the forgotten actual, the bounds of ordinary sense-experience were burst, and the world of the dreams was not the human world, but some other, infernal or supernal. The sense of space, and latterly the sense of time, were strangely affected. One moved, or hung, or sank, in measureless chasms, unshored astronomical abysses, or depths without a star; minutes shot out into years, or centuries were shrivelled into minutes. When the dream-scenery was most earthly, there was never any comfort in it, but always a sense of misery, dread, struggle and battle, eternal pursuit of something, or eternal flight from some unescapable enemy. He gives specimens of some of the dreams that were most frequent or most hideous. Sometimes, in some recollection of the Malay, the dream-imagery was Oriental, Egypt adding her horrors to those of China and Hindostan, and all three yielding a monstrous jumble of things animate and inanimate, amid which he was compelled to move and suffer,

seeking refuge in vain in pagodas and their most secret rooms, or chased for ages through tropical forests, or buried in caves with mummies and sphinxes and all the abominations of the ibis and crocodile. At other times, though the dream-scenery at first might be Oriental or Alpine, or of grave-yards in some quiet valley, it would turn at last into multitudinous and lamp-lit London, with its mazes and labyrinths of streets, and through those mazes and labyrinths he would himself be wandering round and round, amid legions of ruffianly faces, groping in vain for the lost Ann of Oxford Street.

To wake day after day at noon from such night-mare miseries, and be aware of his wife and children standing by him, and to know that, when the day waned, it would only be to plunge him again into the hideous tumult of his other or opium-generated existence, became an agony unsufferable. He shrank from the approach of sleep, and longed to sleep no more. His condition in his waking hours was that of a "suicidal despondency;" there seemed no exit from his wretchedness but suicide or lunacy. At last, however—just when the reader is tired of the monotony of so much misery, and pity is passing into something like disgust, especially in recollection of the young wife and mother who had to be the nurse of her opium-besotted husband, and indeed when one has been taking refuge from the necessity of such disgust in the fancy that matters were not so bad as they are described, and that some of the more hideous opium-dreams were subsequent constructions of literary genius, in which fiction was piled upon remembered fact—just at this point one is able to leave the ugly sea of storm and confusion, and to set foot on a landing-place. This we do in the year 1819. There had, indeed, been a gleam of returning

hope in the previous year. In the very thickest depth of De Quincey's mental obscurity, when he could attend to nothing, and had abandoned a certain great philosophical work, *De Emendatione Humani Intellectus*, which he had projected in imitation of Spinoza, he had been roused by the receipt, from a friend in Edinburgh, of a copy of Ricardo's *Principles of Political Economy*, then recently published. The book fascinated him; he could read and enjoy it; he admired the author prodigiously; Ricardo seemed to him the first man who had shot light and order into what had hitherto been but a "dark chaos of materials." He was moved even to write, or to dictate to his wife, thoughts that grew out of his reading. There had thus grown in his hands the manuscript of a book or pamphlet entitled *Prolegomena to all Future Systems of Political Economy*. The book had been actually advertised, and arrangements made for printing it, when the opium-torpor again fell upon him and the manuscript was left incomplete. Now, however, in 1819, he shook himself free with more effect. The circumstances are left shadowy; and it does not seem that it was then, or till a while later, that he achieved what he calls his "triumph," or release for a good while together from his thralldom to opium. Enough is told, however, to show that, notwithstanding all the exertions of his gentle wife, the *res angusta domi* had become so severe in the cottage at Grasmere that even the opium-torpor had to relax its hold and permit the master of the household to rise and look about him. By some immense effort De Quincey had moderated his dependence on the drug, and was looking about him in something like restored capacity for work, when—Oh, bathos from the projected *De Emendatione Humani Intellectus* and the *Prolegomena to all Future Systems of*

Political Economy!—he was caught by the Westmoreland Tories and converted into the editor of their local newspaper.

The *Westmoreland Gazette* had been started in 1818, during the general election of that year, when Mr. Brougham had the first of his three unsuccessful contests for the great northern county. It was started at Kendal, on funds raised by gentlemen who were "friends to the Constitution," to oppose the "infamous levelling doctrines" of Mr. Brougham and of the local Whig organ called the *Kendal Chronicle*. An editor had been procured from London, but had turned out a failure; and about the middle of 1819 the editorship was offered to De Quincey. They had offered him a salary of 180*l.* a year; but, as this was to be for the performance of all the duties, and as that involved residence in Kendal, De Quincey preferred an arrangement by which he was to pay a sub-editor to do the drudgery at Kendal, keeping the surplus for himself for his leading articles and supervising editorship from Grasmere. The sub-editor whom he engaged would not take less than two guineas a week, leaving but 50*l.* 16*s.* for his chief; but the proprietors handsomely made up this sum to 54*l.* 12*s.*, or a complete guinea a week. Of all this De Quincey sent a detailed account, in very hopeful terms, to his uncle in India, informing the colonel at the same time that he had engagements with *Blackwood's Magazine* and the *Quarterly Review*, which would bring him 180*l.* a year more, and concluding with a request to be allowed to draw upon the colonel for 500*l.*, "say 150*l.* now, and the other 350*l.* in six or eight months hence." This would re-establish him for life, he said, and he looked forward to a removal to London, to resume his training for the profession of the law.

The specimens given by Mr. Page, from the files of the *Westmoreland Gazette*, of De Quincey's leading articles and notices to correspondents during his time of editorship, confirm Mr. Page's general conclusion that he "was not born for a successful newspaper editor." Perhaps the most characteristic of the quoted specimens is an article in which, in answer to remonstrances that he was flying over the heads of his readers, he expounds his ideas of provincial editorship in general and of the prospects of the *Westmoreland Gazette* in particular. "The editor," he says, "can assure his readers that his own personal friends in most of the Universities, especially the three weightiest—Oxford, Cambridge, and Edinburgh—are quite competent in number and power to float the *Gazette* triumphantly into every section and division of those learned bodies." Nor was this all. While not neglecting the demands of his humbler constituents of Westmoreland, he could not forget that well-educated and learned readers were numerous in the county. For their sakes he is proud to intimate that he "has received assurances of support from two of the most illustrious men in point of intellectual pretensions that have appeared for some ages"—whether Wordsworth and Coleridge, or Wordsworth and Southey, is not quite obvious. But even this is not all. "The editor will go a step further. He will venture to affirm that, even without the powerful aid here noticed (to which he might have added a promise of co-operation from London, the four great commercial towns of the second class, many of the third class, and so downwards, as also occasionally from Paris and Vienna, from Canada, and from Hindostan, &c.)—even without the powerful aid here noticed, he could singly and unsupported secure to the *Gazette* one feature of originality which would

draw upon it a general notice throughout Great Britain." Was not German Literature a yet unworked mine of wealth, an absolute Potosi; and might not the editor say without vanity, since his part would be only that of selecting and translating, that no journal in the kingdom could draw on this mine so easily, or exhibit such nuggets from it weekly, as the *Westmoreland Gazette*? All this for a guinea a week to the editor at Grasmere, with two guineas a week for the grimy cormorant drudging for him in some public-house at Kendal! There is something like evidence, however, that the cormorant was dismissed, and that De Quincey took up his quarters for some time at Kendal, uniting the functions of editor and sub-editor, and, it is to be hoped, their salaries. There is one letter from him to his wife, at all events, dated "Commercial Inn, 11 o'clock on Thursday night," which presents him as then in Kendal by himself, before a table covered with printer's proofs, and very heavy-hearted at being away from Grasmere. He has been vexed particularly by news of the illness of his little child Margaret. "God bless her, poor little lamb!" he ejaculates affectionately, adding that, if his wife cannot come to Kendal to-morrow, he will try to be at Grasmere next week.

After all, De Quincey seems to have done not badly in his editorship, even by the standard of the Tory gentlemen of Westmoreland. If the local circulation was not large, the matter administered was probably more acceptable to the country folks than that of Coleridge's *Friend*. One thing the editorship had done for De Quincey himself. It had given him a liking for the sight of printer's proofs. Accordingly, his editorship of the *Westmoreland Gazette* having come to an end some time in 1820, or been converted, by understanding with the proprietors, into a mere con-

tributorship thenceforward, he was on the outlook for other literary employment. Not unnaturally his thoughts turned first to Edinburgh, where his friend Wilson, now Professor of Moral Philosophy, had since 1817 been the lord of *Blackwood's Magazine*, and he and Lockhart and a band of daring young Tories about them had made that magazine at once a terror and a new splendour in the island, and where there was no lack of other literary possibilities and openings. The engagement on *Blackwood* mentioned by De Quincey to his uncle in 1819 had, it would appear, turned out a quasi-engagement only; and in the end of 1820 he is found in Edinburgh in person, examining chances on the spot. In a letter to his wife thence, dated December 9, 1820, he speaks of the cordial reception he has had among his old Edinburgh friends. Nothing definite, however, seems to have come of the visit. Wilson, one cannot doubt, did his best; but there may have been difficulties. And so, not yet an actual contributor to *Blackwood*, but only a potential contributor, De Quincey was back at his home in the Lakes early in 1821. It was in London, and not in Edinburgh, that he was first to appear as a writer in magazines.

CHAPTER VII.

PARTLY IN LONDON, PARTLY AT THE LAKES, PARTLY IN EDINBURGH.—THE "CONFESSIONS" AND OTHER ARTICLES IN THE "LONDON MAGAZINE," AND FIRST ARTICLES IN "BLACKWOOD."

[1821-1830.]

THE metropolitan magazine of chief note in those days was the *London Magazine*. It had been established in January, 1820, with Messrs. Baldwin, Cradock, & Co. for the publishers, and the Aberdonian Mr. John Scott for editor; but, in July, 1821, after the death of Scott in his unfortunate duel, it passed into the hands of Messrs. Taylor & Hessey, who were thenceforward themselves the editors. And very good editors they were. Aiming high, and having retained the best of the contributors in Scott's time and added others, they had already, in 1821, a sufficiently remarkable staff about them, whom they kept in good-humour and a kind of stimulated unity of endeavour, not only by what was then considered liberal pay, but also by an excellent monthly dinner, for talk and wit-combat, at the expense of the firm. Keats, who had contributed verses to the earlier numbers, had died in February, 1821; but Charles Lamb, at the age of forty-six, and under his newly-adopted signature of "Elia," was obliging Messrs. Taylor & Hessey and the world with fresh specimens of his charming essays. Among the other contributors

were, or were to be, Hazlitt, John Hamilton Reynolds, the stalwart Allan Cunningham, the Rev. Henry Francis Cary, John Poole, George Darley, Bryan Waller Procter, and Thomas Hood. This last, indeed, at the age of twenty-three, was a kind of assistant editor. There was also a certain shabby-genteel and bejewelled effeminate, named Thomas Griffith Wainwright, whose department was the Fine Arts, and who, under the signature of "Janus Weathercock," wrote most of the articles on great painters and engravers, and criticisms of contemporary pictures. He was to die in Australia long afterwards as a convict who had been transported for forgery, but who was known also, by evidence irresistible, as the murderer, by poison, of two young ladies, boarders in his house, on whose lives he had speculated for a total of 18,000*l.* by scattered investments in different insurance offices.

It is curious to look over the old volumes of the *London Magazine* now, and to observe the papers in them that have become classic. It was in the number for September, 1821, or about two months after Messrs. Taylor & Hessey had become proprietors, that there appeared a paper of twenty pages entitled *Confessions of an Opium-eater, being an Extract from the Life of a Scholar*. That there were unusual expectations of popularity for this piece is proved by the appended editorial note (? by young Hood), stating that "the remainder of this very interesting article will be given in the next number." Accordingly, the number for October, 1821, leads off with Part II. of the *Confessions* in twenty-seven pages. It contains, moreover, a notice from the author explanatory of the dates in the First Part, and another editorial paragraph of congratulation over the new contributor. "We are not often in the habit of eulogizing our own work," says the paragraph;

"but we cannot neglect the opportunity which the following explanatory note gives us of calling the attention of our readers to the deep, eloquent, and masterly paper which stands first in our present number." The *Confessions*, in fact, were widely read, and roused much curiosity. The cry, on all hands, was for more of the same extraordinary matter. That was not so easy; but in the number for December, 1821, there appeared a letter from the Opium-eater, signed "X. Y. Z.," courteously rebuking Mr. James Montgomery for his scepticism as to the authenticity of the *Confessions*, and promising a Third Part in time. Meanwhile, in the same number, the public had from the new author, signing himself "Grasmeriensis Teutonizans," a paper *On the Writings of John Paul Frederick Richter*, including a translated specimen. Then, for a whole year, there was a break, the promise of a continuation of the *Confessions* hanging unfulfilled, and the readers of the magazine having to content themselves with other fare, the best morsel of which was Charles Lamb's "Dissertation on Roast Pig," in September, 1822. In that year, 1822, however, Messrs. Taylor & Hessey had the pleasure of bringing out the *Confessions of an English Opium-eater* in a separate little duodecimo volume, the author's name still suppressed. They would fain still have had the promised continuation in their magazine, and apologized to their readers for not having been able to fulfil that engagement. By way of compensation, they were glad to publish, through the years 1823 and 1824, everything that De Quincey chose to give them; taking care that it should be known that the articles were by "The English Opium-eater."

In January, 1823, were begun *Letters to a Young Man whose Education has been Neglected*, continued in the num-

bers for February, March, May, and June; in the April number, which these "Letters" had skipped, appeared a sketch of Herder under the title *The Death of a German Great Man*; and, not to mention less important contributions straggling through the numbers of the year, the September number contained the first instalment, and the October and November numbers two more instalments, of the series of papers entitled generally *Notes from the Pocket-book of a late Opium-eater*, and sub-titled individually "Walking Stewart," "Malthus," "On the Knocking at the Gate in Macbeth," "English Dictionaries," &c. In December, 1823, an *Answer of the Opium-eater to Mr. Hazlitt's Letter respecting Mr. Malthus*, and a paper *On Malthus's Measure of Value*, made the public further aware of the Opium-eater's pretensions in Political Economy. The year 1824 was not less prolific. The January number of that year gave the first part of the Opium-eater's *Historico-critical Inquiry into the Origin of the Rosicrucians and Freemasons*, continued in February and March, and not concluded till June; the February number gave also *Anecdotes from John Paul Richter*, in the form of five more translated specimens of that author; the March number gave, as an additional specimen of Richter, his *Dream upon the Universe*; and in various numbers from March to July there were further instalments of *Notes from the Pocket-book of a late Opium-eater*. Thus we arrive at the months of August and September, 1824, made memorable by a special contribution from the Opium-eater. Another British pioneer of German Literature had recently appeared in Mr. Thomas Carlyle, ten years younger than De Quincey, and of limited reputation as yet. His translation of Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister* had just been published anonymously in Edinburgh; and, having been recommend-

ed to the *London Magazine* by Edward Irving, he was breaking up, to be sent from Scotland, for anonymous publication in that magazine, his *Life of Schiller*, then in manuscript. The first portion of the *Life* had appeared in the number for October, 1823; the second portion had appeared in the number for January, 1824, along with the first instalment of De Quincey's Rosicrucian Inquiry; the third had appeared in July, 1824 (Carlyle then on his first visit to London); and the remainder came out in August and September. It was rather hard that in those very two numbers there should appear De Quincey's article on Goethe, founded on his fellow-contributor's *Translation of Wilhelm Meister*. In the main, it is true, the article was an onslaught on Goethe himself—an attempt to drag him down from the eminence claimed for him by his translator and others, and to represent him as a tedious and immoral old impostor; but the translator came in for a share of the blame. He was taken to task for his Scotticisms, his mistakes in the German, and generally for the stiffness and awkwardness of his English prose. Altogether the critique was, as Carlyle has owned, a rather annoying log of offence thrown across his path at that moment. After the article on Goethe, De Quincey's contributions to the magazine in 1824 were *Walladmor: Analysis of a German Novel*, and a translation of Kant's *Idea of a Universal History on a Cosmopolitical Plan*, both in the October number; and a paper entitled *Falsification of the History of England*, which appeared in the number for December.

The connexion of De Quincey with the *London Magazine* seems to have ceased after 1824, in consequence of arrangements about that time by Messrs. Taylor & Hessey for quitting the proprietorship. But others were on the alert for anything from the pen of "The Opium-eat-

er." Mr. Charles Knight, who had started his *Knight's Quarterly Magazine* in 1823, and who counted the brilliant young Macaulay and the brilliant young Praed on his staff, had obtained at least one article from De Quincey, and had become personally acquainted with him in July, 1824, with a view to more. But a good deal of De Quincey's time in the year 1825 was taken up with a wretched piece of literary business into which he had been lured by his own analysis of the German novel *Walladmor* in the *London Magazine* of October, 1824. The said *Walladmor* was a German fabrication, in the shape of a pretended "New Romance by the Author of Waverley," brought out at Leipsic at a time when there was a lull in the production of those real Waverley Novels without which German readers, as well as British, found life insipid. Germany was deceived from end to end by the three-volume substitute for the absent reality. The first copy imported into England having come into De Quincey's hands, he had scribbled his article on it for the magazine as rapidly as he could, with the unfortunate effect that, having hit on some passages of merit and translated them, he was commissioned by Messrs. Taylor & Hessey to translate the whole. When he became better acquainted with the rubbish he would gladly have been free from the task; but, as that could not be, he took his revenge by treating the affair as a practical joke. He so cut and carved the original, and De Quinceyified it by insertions and compressions, as to be able to bring out, in the course of 1825, an English *Walladmor* in two volumes, with a prefixed "dedication" of elaborate banter.

And so, from 1821 to 1825, or between De Quincey's thirty-seventh and his forty-first year, we have the first burst of his magazine articles and cognate publications.

If he had come late into the field of literature, he had come into it at last with one advantage. There had been immense, if unintended, preparation; De Quincey's articles, like George Eliot's novels afterwards, had not to be spun out of a vacuum. There can be no doubt, however, that De Quincey's sudden leap into celebrity was due in great part to the peculiar nature of the articles by which he had chosen to introduce himself. There was something almost staggering in the act of self-exposure by which a man consented that he should be known as "The Opium-eater," not figuratively or fictitiously, as some at first supposed, but with the most positive assurances that his revelations were real excerpts from his own life. The signature of "The Opium-eater" to any article whatever became thenceforward an attraction. Not that this would have lasted long had there not been recompense in superlative measure in the articles themselves. But who could deny that there was such recompense? Here, evidently, was no common writer, no duinard or hack, but a new man of genius, a new power in English prose literature. There was proclamation of the fact in a quarter whence a favorable verdict was then of some value. As early as October, 1823, "The Opium-eater" had been made to figure as a colloquist in Wilson's *Noctes Ambrosianæ*; and again, in October, 1825, there was a passage in the *Noctes* praising De Quincey as "a man of a million." This, of course, was kindness on Wilson's part; but it was no exaggeration of the current opinion.

What meanwhile, through the four years of his growing celebrity, had De Quincey himself been doing? Though Grasmere was still his nominal head-quarters (where, indeed, his books and papers had by this time overflowed his own cottage at Townend, and invaded his father-in-law's cottage

of Rydal Nab, if not a third cottage adjacent), the clear inference from the records is that from 1821 to 1825 he resided chiefly in London. There is a very interesting note on the subject, though with some exaggeration of the fact, in Bohn's edition of Lowndes's *Bibliographer's Manual*. "The *Confessions*," Mr. Bohn says, "were written in a little room at the back of Mr. H. G. Bohn's premises, No. 4 York Street, Covent Garden, where Mr. De Quincey resided, in comparative seclusion, for several years. He had previously lived in the neighbourhood of Soho Square, and for some years was a frequent visitor to the shop of Mr. Bohn's father, then the principal dealer in German books. The writer remembers that he always seemed to speak in a kind of whisper." From De Quincey's own reminiscences we gather some other particulars. It was during the time of his connexion with the *London Magazine* that he came thoroughly to know Lamb and his sister and saw most of them. They were excessively kind to him, insisting on his coming from his solitary lodgings as often as possible to dine and spend the evening with them; and he describes some of those quiet evenings with the Lambs very tenderly and prettily, testifying the increase of his regard for the good brother and sister the more he knew of their heroic relations to each other, and of their real benevolence. He does not seem to have been frequently at the monthly dinners given by Messrs. Taylor & Hessey to their magazine staff, and at which Lamb, as the chief of the wits round the table, always stuttered and sparkled at his brightest. Barry Cornwall could remember De Quincey's appearance at only one of those dinners, when "the expression of his face was intelligent, but cramped and somewhat peevish," and when he "was self-involved and did not add to the cheerfulness of the meet-

ing." This may have been at the particular dinner of November, 1821, at which, as De Quincey tells us himself, he met Mr. Wainwright among the company, did not like him, and rather wondered why Lamb paid him so much attention. Walks with Hazlitt and little angry discussions with him, and glimpses of young Talfourd and other lights rising or risen on the skirts of Messrs. Taylor & Hessey's literary group, are also to be imagined. The sub-editorial calls at his lodgings by young Thomas Hood, on the "frequent and agreeable duty" of dunning him for copy, must not be forgotten. Then it was, as Hood liked to remember in after-years, that he used to find De Quincey "in the midst of a German Ocean of Literature," his room flooded and plugged with books, and that, invited sometimes to stay, he would listen with amazement to the strange tenant of the rooms far into the small hours. He still retained a memento of those visits, he adds, in the original manuscript of one of De Quincey's papers, exhibiting the stain of "a large purplish ring" where the tumbler of laudanum negus had rested on it. For, in his London solitude, and apparently in 1823-'24, the author of the *Confessions*, who had signified that the days of his opium-eating were past, had again succumbed. What with this relapse into his old habit, what with the constant depression of his ill-health, he was again very wretched; and the picture we have to form of him in those days from all the preserved memorials is the very reverse of that which would have been natural in any other case of such suddenly attained literary distinction. Not as a lion in general society or as a frequenter of club-dinners, or even as a man at home of his own accord in the houses of a few select friends, is the De Quincey of 1821-'25 to be figured, but rather as the confirmed and incurable eccentric, the in-

carnation of shy nervousness, that he was to be for all the rest of his life. He avoided intercourse with his fellow-creatures as much as he could, and was happy, if he was ever happy, only in solitary afternoon walks about Covent Garden and the Strand, where he could observe passers-by and look into shop-windows, or in longer rambles at night out into unknown suburbs, whence he could return, by silent circuits of roads, to his own book-blocked room and the laudanum negus.

Now, as afterwards, friends and admirers who desired his intimacy had, as it were, to break in upon him. We do hear of one or two such friendly inroads on his comfortless privacy. Thus, in the summer of 1824, Mr. Matthew Davenport Hill sought him out, and roused him not a little. More effective still seems to have been Mr. Charles Knight's acquaintanceship with him, begun, as we have seen, in the interests of *Knight's Quarterly Magazine*. Mr. Knight, six years younger than De Quincey, and ardent in literature in those days with even more than the usual ardour of a young publisher, liked nothing better than to get De Quincey to dine with him, or stay with him awhile, in his house in Pall Mall East. "O! for an hour of De Quincey!" he wrote years afterwards, in recollection of those evenings in comparison with any he had spent in the interval; and he has handed down several anecdotes illustrative of the incredible helplessness of the little guest whom he and his household so liked to shelter. One day in 1825, Mr. Knight, returning from Windsor, found that De Quincey, whom he had left in his house in Pall Mall East, had departed abruptly, leaving word that he had gone home to Westmoreland. Knowing that he had intended to go thither, and had only been waiting for a remittance from his mother, to "satisfy some clamorous

creditors" before he went, Mr. Knight thought nothing of the matter. In a few days, however, he heard that De Quincey was still in town, and in a dreadful difficulty. Following the clue to his whereabouts, he found him in a miserable lodging on the Surrey side of the river, his "dreadful difficulty" being that the expected remittance had reached him in the form of a large draft on a London bank, payable at twenty-one days' sight, and that he had been informed, on going to Lombard Street, that the draft could not be cashed till the time was up. Too shy to return to Mr. Knight's house and explain why he had come back, he had gone, for accommodation for the twenty-one days, into a hiding-hole where he was really not safe from being robbed; and it was with surprise, as well as delight, that he received Mr. Knight's assurance that the difficulty about the draft was not insuperable, and he might have the cash at once.

Mr. Knight's anecdote fits in but too well with other proofs that one of the causes of De Quincey's moping and evasive habits through the time of his London life was excruciating pecuniary embarrassment. And no wonder. The calculation even now is that a writer for magazines and reviews can hardly, by his utmost industry, unless he is also on the staff of a newspaper, or is exceptionally retained by a fixed engagement—as Southey and Macaulay were—make more than 250*l.* a year. On that hypothesis it is not difficult to compute that all De Quincey's earnings between 1821 and 1825, by the *London Magazine* or whatever else, must have been a poor provision for the expenses of himself in London and of his family at Grasmere. In fact, however it happened, he was so much in debt, and so hard-pressed for money, as to be on this account also desperately miserable. "At this time," he had

written to Professor Wilson, in Edinburgh, on the 24th of February, 1825, "I am quite free from opium; but it has left the liver—the Achilles' heel of almost every human fabric—subject to affections which are tremendous for the weight of wretchedness attached to them. To fence with these with the one hand, and with the other to maintain the war with the wretched business of hack-author, with all its horrible degradations, is more than I am able to bear. At this moment I have not a place to hide my head in. Something I meditate—I know not what. . . . With a good publisher and leisure to premeditate what I write, I might yet liberate myself: after which, having paid everybody, I would slink into some dark corner, educate my children, and show my face in the world no more." He adds that he may be addressed either "to the care of Mrs. De Quincey, Rydal Nab, Westmoreland," or "to the care of M. D. Hill, Esq., 11 King's Bench Walk, Temple;" but that the latter address might be the better, because he would rather not be tracked too precisely at present. Perhaps it was the "large draft" of Mr. Knight's anecdote that cleared the way for the desired return to Westmoreland. Not at this point only in De Quincey's biography has the reader to suspect "remittances from his mother" of which there is no distinct record.

De Quincey was certainly back in Westmoreland before the end of 1825, and in circumstances tolerably easy after his late London experience. "Thank God, you are not now domineered over by circumstances, and may your noble nature never more be disturbed but by its own workings!" we find Wilson writing to him from Edinburgh on the 12th November in that year. The letter, which begins "My dear Plato," speaks of promised contributions by De Quincey to a forthcoming volume of miscellanies which

Wilson and Lockhart had projected, under the name of *Janus, or the Edinburgh Literary Almanac*. It also adverts to Lockhart's commencing editorship of the *Quarterly Review*, and to the interest De Quincey may have in that event. "He knows your great talents, and will, I know, act in the most gentlemanly spirit to all contributors;" and why should not De Quincey be thinking of a noble article on Kant for the new editor?

Though *Janus* had to appear in the beginning of 1826 without De Quincey's hand in it, Wilson's letter prepares us for the next important stage in his literary life. This was his connexion, through Wilson, with *Blackwood's Magazine*. It began by the publication in the number of that magazine for November, 1826, of the first portion of an article on Lessing, entitled *Lessing's Laocoon, translated with Notes*. The second portion appeared in the number for January, 1827; and was followed in February, 1827, by *The Last Days of Immanuel Kant* and the famous essay *On Murder considered as One of the Fine Arts*; and in March, 1827, appeared the paper entitled *Toilette of the Hebrew Lady*. After an interval—i. e., in August, 1830—there was another paper on Kant, entitled *Kant in his Miscellaneous Essays*.

The connexion with *Blackwood* very naturally drew De Quincey himself once more to Edinburgh. Accordingly, through the years 1827, 1828, and 1829, we find him quite as much in Edinburgh as at Grasmere. He was, of course, no stranger there, but moved about familiarly among such surviving friends of his former visits as were still resident in the city. Wilson was his mainstay, the man who had known him longest and understood him best, and whose own joviality of disposition made it easier for him than it would have been for most to tol-

erate the eccentricities of such a weird little son of genius and opium. Wilson's house in Gloucester Place was at De Quincey's disposal when he liked; and one of the best sketches of De Quincey is that by Wilson's daughter, Mrs. Gordon, in her life of her father, where she gives her recollections of the Opium-eater's troublesome irregularities of habit in the house, the cook's difficulties with him and profound reverence for him, and all the while Wilson's magnanimous laugh at the whole concern. It was at this time too, and indirectly through Wilson, that Carlyle first saw something of De Quincey personally. They met, I think, at the house of one of Wilson's friends, after which there were calls from De Quincey at Comely Bank, where Carlyle and his wife had their Edinburgh home between their marriage in 1826 and their removal to the Dumfriesshire solitude of Craigenputtock in 1828. At first, De Quincey, remembering his review of Carlyle's *Translation of Wilhelm Meister*, was obviously ill at ease; but, that matter left unmentioned, the meetings seem to have been pleasant enough on both sides. That Carlyle's interest in De Quincey, at all events, was far from small at this time is proved by his long letter from Craigenputtock, of December 11, 1828, inviting De Quincey to visit him and his wife there. "Our warmest welcome, and such solacements as even the desert does not refuse," Carlyle writes, "are at any time and at all times in store for one we love so well;" and, after a humorous description of a possible colony or social college of like-minded spirits on the moors round Craigenputtock, there is the complimentary addition, "Would *you* come hither and be king over us, then indeed we had made a fair beginning, and the *Bog School* might snap its fingers at the *Lake School*." Nearer the end of the letter came these significant words,

"Believe it, you are well loved here, and none feels better than I what a spirit is for the present eclipsed in clouds. For the present it can only be; time and chance are for all men; that troublous season will end." Evidently De Quincey's troubles of various kinds were clinging to him in Edinburgh, and Carlyle knew all.

The pecuniary trouble, for one, had not ceased. It was a great thing, doubtless, to be a writer in *Blackwood*; but a few articles in that magazine in the course of four years could not do much towards the support of the man of letters in Edinburgh and of his wife and young ones in the Vale of Grasmere. There was income, doubtless, from other sources—perhaps from periodicals in London, perhaps from newspapers, and certainly from the *Edinburgh Literary Gazette*, a weekly periodical then of some note in Edinburgh, to which De Quincey contributed occasionally through 1828, 1829, and 1830. But the deficit altogether must have been serious and growing. What was the remedy? Poor as the pastures in Edinburgh were, they were better than were likely to be found anywhere else. His chief existing engagements were there; and nowhere else did farther engagements seem so easy. Why, then, keep up two households, or pretences of a household, one in Edinburgh and one in Westmoreland? Why should not Mrs. De Quincey and her children leave their native vale and be domiciled with De Quincey permanently in Edinburgh? Both De Quincey and his wife were adverse to the idea of leaving Grasmere; but at length, in 1830, apparently on the spur of some new offer of literary engagement in Edinburgh, the resolution was taken. It was precipitated by the advice of the excellent and sensible Dorothy Wordsworth. In a long letter of Dorothy's to De Quincey, giving him an account of a

visit she had paid to his cottage just after her return to Rydal Mount from a tour, she tells him she had found his wife well, but "with something of sadness in her manner" when she spoke of the likelihood of his detention in Edinburgh by a certain new engagement of which she had heard vaguely. Dorothy's reply, she informs De Quincey, had been, "Why not settle there, for the time at least that this engagement lasts? Lodgings are cheap in Edinburgh, and provisions and coals not dear." Mrs. De Quincey, having acquiesced, had asked Dorothy to write on the subject to De Quincey; and hence her letter. She there repeats her advice in greater detail, with all delicacy but very practically. The first step taken in the direction of the advice seems to have been the removal of the elder children from Grasmere to Edinburgh; but in 1830 Mrs. De Quincey and the younger children followed. The cottage in Grasmere was nominally retained as De Quincey's for some years more; but from 1830 Edinburgh, and Edinburgh all but alone, was to contain him and his, and their united fortunes, so long as he remained in the world. He was then forty-five years of age, and his wife about two-and-thirty.

CHAPTER VIII.

WHOLLY IN EDINBURGH.—FURTHER CONTRIBUTIONS TO
“BLACKWOOD” AND ARTICLES IN “TAIT’S MAGAZINE.”

[1830–1840.]

EDINBURGH from 1830 to 1840 was a very excellent place of residence. The indestructible natural beauties of her site and surroundings, the extraordinary combination of dense and antique picturesqueness with modern elegance and spaciousness in the plan and architecture of her streets and slopes, and the wealth of her interesting traditions from the past, were not her only recommendations. A pleasant and varied social activity still characterized her as the metropolis of Scotland, and an unusual number of persons of greater or less note individually moved among her 130,000 or 150,000 inhabitants. Her greatest man, it is true, was lost to her in 1832, when Scott died, and heads could no longer be turned to look at his venerated figure as he limped along Princes Street. But Jeffrey remained Lord Advocate of Scotland from 1830 to 1834, and thenceforward a Judge with the title of Lord Jeffrey, only ex-editor of the *Edinburgh Review* now, and not writing much more, but still the literary pride of the Edinburgh Whigs. Wilson, on the other hand, as the “Christopher North” of *Blackwood* and the eloquent and adored University Professor, was in his most exuberant prime—Scott’s successor, so far as there was one, in the literary

chiefship of Edinburgh Toryism—and the observed of all observers, Whig or Tory, for his lion-like gait and gesture, wild yellow hair, and frequent white hat. Then, among Jeffrey's colleagues or subordinates in the Parliament House, or Wilson's associates in the University, or belonging to both fraternities, or distributed in divers posts and professions through the city, what a miscellany of other local celebrities! Among the lawyers, on the bench or rising to it, were Moncreiff, Cockburn, Patrick Robertson, Rutherford, Ivory, and Murray. Among the University Professors, in one or other of the faculties, were Sir William Hamilton (first in the chair of History, and after 1836 in that of Logic and Metaphysics), Dr. Chalmers (brought to Edinburgh in 1828 as Professor of Theology), Dunbar, Pillans, Welsh, Macvey Napier, Jameson, Hope, Monro *tertius*, Sir Charles Bell, Pulteney Alison, Syme, Christison, and (from 1835) George Moir. Conspicuous in science or in medicine out of the University were Dr. Abercrombie, Sir David Brewster, Andrew and George Combe, and others. McCrie, the biographer of Knox, was alive for part of the time; before the ten years were out Candlish and Guthrie were in their Edinburgh pulpits; and those who preferred milder or Episcopalian pastorship could "sit under" the Rev. E. B. Ramsay, afterwards Dean Ramsay, or the Rev. Robert Morehead. There was a flourishing Edinburgh theatre, with the accomplished Mr. Murray as manager and one of the actors, and with Mackay as the non-such in "Bailie Nicol Jarvie," "Caleb Balderstone," and other comic characters in the dramas from Scott's novels. Among resident representatives of the Fine Arts were Sir William Allan, Watson Gordon, Harvey, Duncan, and the recluse and abstruse David Scott; and among resident, or all but resident, representatives of

literature not already mentioned, most of them lawyers and in training for legal posts or professorships, were Thomas Thomson, Sir Thomas Dick Lauder, David Laing, Charles Kirkpatrick Sharpe, David Macbeth Moir, Henry Glassford Bell, Archibald Alison, William and Robert Chambers, Ferrier, Spalding, Thomas Aird, Hill Burton, John Thomson Gordon, and William Edmonstoune Aytoun. Lady Nairne, the woman of finest lyric genius Scotland has produced, unless Lady Wardlaw may be compared with her, was living in the near vicinity, her claims to authorship of any kind as yet undivulged; and the best-known literary ladies of Edinburgh were Miss Ferrier and Mrs. Johnstone. The chief newspapers were the *Scotsman*, edited by Mr. Charles Maclaren; and the *Caledonian Mercury*, edited by Dr. James Browne; and the two editors had fought a duel. An event of real importance was the foundation of *Chambers's Edinburgh Journal*, by Messrs. William and Robert Chambers, in 1832, superseding the previous literary weeklies of the city, and setting the example of cheapness for all future British periodicals. The Reform Bill agitation for some time, and then the other agitations that grew out of that, provided political hot water in abundance for the ten years; and in no community was the supply kept at a higher temperature. If you lived in Edinburgh between 1830 and 1840 you must be a Whig or a Tory; on one or other of those two stools you were compelled to sit, as by a law of human existence; they would not permit you to try both, or to stand, or to walk about. Further, as the mere mention of the name of Dr. Chalmers will have suggested, that was the time of this great man's energetic leadership in the ecclesiastical politics of Scotland, and of the beginnings of that ecclesiastical strife which, manifest-

ing itself more fiercely from year to year in the annual General Assemblies of the Kirk in Edinburgh, had its final issue in 1843 in the disruption of the Scottish Establishment.

Such was the Edinburgh within which the English eccentric and visionary was enclosed from his forty-sixth year to his fifty-sixth. We know now what to think of him in his relations to the community in which he had sought refuge. If we set aside Dr. Chalmers, a really great man, cast in nature's largest mould, but not specially a man of letters, and if we set aside also Sir William Hamilton, as less the man of letters than the scholastic thinker, then in all Edinburgh, after Scott's death, with due exception for the uncombed strength and barbaric word-splendours of Christopher North, the most important intellectual figure was the shy little English stranger. It was De Quincey that the real lovers of literature in Edinburgh ought to have sought out, if they wanted to put the very rarest they had amongst them on a pedestal in front of the Register House, to be publicly saluted and gazed at. They did nothing of the kind. It was not known to the vast majority of the inhabitants of Edinburgh that anybody of the name of De Quincey was living among them; and even the young lovers of literature that knew a little about him all but invariably misspelt his name when they wrote it or printed it. The reasons are pretty obvious. Merely as an Englishman, De Quincey was somewhat out of his element. He was in Edinburgh, but not of Edinburgh, a little put out by the Scottish "*Sawbath*," as he used to write it jocularly, and by cognate observances (though in this he had native sympathizers), and not in touch with any part of the municipal tumult around him. But much more was his

social insignificance owing to the fact that he was simply De Quincey. By temperament and habit he was a creature evasive of all publicity, a "fantastical duke of dark corners;" and he had seen too many specimens of literary eminence already, in Wordsworth, Coleridge, and others, to have much passion left for such new literary acquaintanceships as Edinburgh might afford. In fact, he did not care very much where he was, if only people would not ask him out to dinner, but would leave him alone with his books, his manuscripts, and his opium.

The literary industry of De Quincey through the ten years is represented mainly by the list of his continued contributions to *Blackwood*, and by a series of contributions to another Edinburgh monthly, called *Tait's Magazine*. In *Blackwood* for 1831 appeared *Dr. Parr and his Contemporaries, or Whiggism in its Relations to Literature*; in the same magazine, under the title of *The Cæsars*, there was begun, in October, 1832, a series of articles on Roman History which extended over four subsequent numbers; in November, 1832, appeared the article entitled *Charlemagne*; and in April, 1833, appeared *The Revolution of Greece*. There was then an interruption of four years; but in July, 1837, appeared the long narrative paper called *Revolt of the Tartars*; which was followed in 1838 by *Household Wreck* and *Modern Greece*, and in 1839 by *Casuistry* and *Dinner, Real and Reputed*. The year 1840 was marked by the production of the series of papers entitled *The Essenes*, the articles entitled *Alleged Plagiarisms of Coleridge* and *Modern Superstition*, and the series on *Style and Rhetoric*. Meanwhile De Quincey had been contributing also to *Tait*, a magazine which had been started by an Edin-

burgh bookseller in 1832 on advanced Whig principles in politics, but perfectly open and unfettered in all literary respects. It was in February, 1834, just at the time of the break with *Blackwood* noted above, that *Tait* began to astonish its readers by *Sketches of Life and Manners from the Autobiography of an English Opium-eater*. The series ran on, sometimes with explanatory sub-titles, through the rest of 1834 and through 1835 and 1836; and, even after the connexion with *Blackwood* was resumed in 1837, *Tait* was able to entertain its readers for three more years with new instalments of the same. The *Sketches*, indeed, extending over about thirty articles in all, contain that Autobiography of De Quincey the republished portions of which in the English edition of his *Collected Works* form, together with the *Confessions*, the most frequently read volumes of the collection. No portions of the series attracted greater attention at the time, or excited more wrath in certain quarters, than the digressions upon the recently dead Coleridge and the still living Wordsworth and Southey. Carlyle has told us how Southey in particular, when he first met him, flamed up on the mention of De Quincey's name, averring that it would be but a proper service to good-manners if some one were to go to Edinburgh and thrash the little wretch; and we hear elsewhere of the offence taken also by the Wordsworths and by members of the Coleridge family. Yet, as Carlyle seems to have thought, the complaints were excessive. The amount of personal gossip in the papers was much less than we have been accustomed to since; the "vivisection," what little there was of it, was avowedly for scientific purposes; and no one could deny the generosity of the general estimates. The admiration expressed for Coleridge and Wordsworth all in all, indeed,

went beyond what the world even then was willing to accord; and it may be doubted whether we have yet in our literature any more interesting accounts of the philosopher and the poet than those admiring, but sharp-sighted, papers. They and the rest of the articles in the same series were, at all events, most acceptable when they appeared in the pages of *Tait*. There were, however, contributions of an independent kind to the same pages, the most important being *A Tory's Account of Toryism, Whiggism, and Radicalism*, in 1835 and 1836. The average amount of De Quincey's contributions to the two magazines jointly through the ten years was about six articles every year. During the same period he wrote the articles *Goethe*, *Pope*, *Shakspeare*, and *Schiller*, for the seventh edition of the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, edited by Mr. Macvey Napier; and there may have been other contributions to minor periodicals. Moreover, during the same period he had produced one of the only two specimens of his powers given to the world originally in the book form. This was his *Klosterheim, or the Masque*, a romance, published by Blackwood, in a duodecimo volume, in 1832.

De Quincey's domestic life in Edinburgh through a period of such marked literary industry is involved in considerable obscurity. We learn incidentally that he was a guest in Wilson's house in Gloucester Place for some time continuously in 1830-'31; we hear of a largish furnished house or set of apartments in Great King Street taken by him for himself and his family in 1831; and we hear further that there were removals to Forres Street, still in the New Town, and to the village of Duddingston, an outskirt of the Old Town, at the back of Arthur Seat. Perhaps there were other shiftings and burrowings. In

general, all that is clear is that there was a succession of domiciles, with always one room in each where, amidst a chaos of books and papers on the floor, chairs, and tables, the indefatigable little scholar could pursue his studies, penning his articles one after another, in his peculiarly neat, small hand, on the little bit of space kept free for the purpose on the table at which he principally sat. For additional particulars we are indebted to the recollections of one of his daughters and to some of the preserved family letters. They present De Quincey to us very touchingly in some of his family relations. The gentlest of human beings, incapable of a word that could wound the feelings of any one near him, and indeed morbidly humble and deferential in his style of address to persons of every rank, though the uniform ornateness of his English caused a kind of awe of him among Scottish servants, he watched his children and moved among them with a doting attention, in which there was much of the edifying, while there was nothing of the authoritative. They grew up in a kind of wondering regard for their father and his ways, insensibly imbibing refinement from the little atmosphere of high tastes which, with whatever appurtenances of disorder and discomfort, his bookish and studious habits kept around them, and receiving an education of no ordinary kind from his supervision of their lessons and his discursive fireside talk. The earliest recollections of the daughter who has been mentioned were of evenings when, to still her crying in the nursery, her father would fetch her in his arms into his own warm room, place her in a chair for the supreme delight of "sitting up with papa," and, after petting her with sips of well-sugared coffee, give her a book and paper-cutter with which to amuse herself while he went on with his writing. He in-

structed her, she remembered, even thus early, in the art of cutting the leaves of books without making ragged edges. Of his eldest son, William, he was the sole tutor, bestowing on the task of his education all that "care and hourly companionship" could do, and with such effect that the boy could show, at the age of sixteen, in proof of his scholarship, "not merely an Etonian skill in the management of Greek metres," but also an original commentary on Suetonius. Of the opium-eating, meanwhile, all we know is that, though found indispensable, it had been, for the most part, brought within bounds.

Three family bereavements fell with heavy effect amid the occupations and changes of residence of those ten years. The first was the death by fever, in 1833, of De Quincey's youngest son, Julius, in the fifth year of his age. The next was the death, in 1835, at the age of not quite eighteen, of the above-mentioned eldest son, William—"my first-born child, the crown and glory of my life," as the poor father wrote afterwards. Then, in 1837, came the death of the wife and mother herself, the poor Margaret Simpson from Grasmere, whose lot it had been to marry this strange man of genius one-and-twenty years before, and to accompany him thus far. One can suppose that hers had not been the easiest or the happiest of lives. "Delicate health and family cares," says her daughter, "made her early withdraw from society; but she seems to have had a powerful fascination for the few friends she admitted to her intimacy." One of these used to tell the daughters that he had "never seen a more gracious or a more beautiful lady;" and it was a standing form of rebuke to them by an old Scotch charwoman, who had been much in the house, and continued to usurp some dominion over them, that none of them would ever be the brave

woman that their mother was. That is all we know of the dalesman's daughter from Grasmere, who died among alien folk in Edinburgh at the age of about thirty-nine, save that they buried her in the West Church-yard, or Church-yard of St. Cuthbert's, beside the children that had gone before her.

There can hardly have been a more helpless widowerhood than that of De Quincey, left in his fifty-second year with six children, the eldest a girl yet in her teens. For two or three years our vision of him and his in their domestic conditions in Edinburgh is an absolute blur, save that we learn that in 1838 he took a lodging for himself at No. 42 Lothian Street, that he might have a separate place for his books and literary labours. But necessity had developed a beautiful power of prudence and self-help among the orphans; and the eldest girl, Margaret, and the next to her in age, Horace, putting their young heads together, struck out a plan. With their father's consent, they took a cottage called Mavis Bush, near Lasswade, about seven miles out of Edinburgh, where they and the four younger ones could live more quietly and economically than in the town, and to which their father could retreat when he wanted retirement. This was in 1840; from which date, on through all the rest of De Quincey's life, the cottage at Lasswade is to be conceived as his chief abode, though without prejudice to the possibility of other refuges and camping-grounds, as the whim occurred to him, in Edinburgh or elsewhere.

CHAPTER IX.

LASSWADE AND EDINBURGH, WITH VISITS TO GLASGOW:
MORE CONTRIBUTIONS TO "BLACKWOOD" AND "TAIT."

[1840-1849.]

THE name "The Cottage at Lasswade" is somewhat misleading. Lasswade is a village of some extent, reached most directly from Edinburgh by the road through the suburb called Newington and thence over the heights of Liberton and Liberton church, and is situated very prettily and picturesquely on the river Esk, at a point where that river has just left the still more picturesque and celebrated beauties of Hawthornden and the glen of Roslin. But Mavis Bush Cottage, now styled in the County Directory "De Quincey Villa," is not in Lasswade, but about a mile and a half beyond it, near the foot of a by-road which descends, by a steep and winding declivity, to that hollow of the Esk which contains Polton Mills and the small Polton railway-station. Though too deep-sunk in the hollow for much cheerfulness of immediate outlook, it is a snug enough little cottage, with its face direct to the road and its bit of garden-ground behind, and with a few other houses about it, above or beneath, on the same slope. The country round is beautifully hilly, with varied and pleasant walks, especially pathways by the sides of the river or up and down its overhanging and well-wooded banks. The interior of the cottage, when lit up in the evenings, must

have been invitingly cosy in its plain elegance in the days when it was De Quincey's. "Our dwelling," he writes to Miss Mitford in 1842, "is a little cottage, containing eight rooms only, one of which (the largest), on what is called in London the first floor, is used as a drawing-room, and one, about half the size, on the ground-floor, as a dining-room, but for a party of ten people at most." He goes on to explain that there were two servants, and that communication with the post-office at Lasswade was intermittent and difficult.

For the present we are concerned only with the first nine years of De Quincey's tenancy of this cottage at Lasswade or Polton, *i. e.*, with the period between 1840 and 1849, bringing him from his fifty-sixth year to his sixty-fifth. And, first of all, as has been already stipulated, the conception of him as located at Lasswade during those nine years has to be corrected by the fact that he was there only when he chose. Freak, or the supposed necessities of his literary work, occasioned pretty frequent removals from Lasswade to lodgings in Edinburgh and elsewhere. How many different rooms in various places he thus occupied in the course of the nine years no one has ascertained; but, as each in turn was "snowed up" by an accumulation of the books and papers he was using for the time, and as, in his morbid terror lest these should be lost, it was usual for him, in leaving any lodging, to entrust the accumulated deposit to the landlady, he is known to have had sometimes the rents of "at least four separate sets of lodgings" all running on simultaneously. It may be well to collect the particulars of his movements, from Lasswade and back to it, through the nine years, so far as the records will serve.

While most of those with whom he had relations were

in Edinburgh, there was an attraction also to Glasgow in an acquaintanceship he had formed with two of the Professors of Glasgow University. These were Mr. J. P. Nichol, Professor of Astronomy, a man of fine genius, and the modest and scholarly Mr. E. L. Lushington, Professor of Greek. Accordingly, for perhaps the greater part of the two years from March, 1841, to June, 1843, De Quincey was in Glasgow as the guest of one or the other of these two friends, or in lodgings beside them. His first Glasgow lodgings were in the High Street, opposite to the Old College; but they were exchanged for rooms at 79 Renfield Street. These last were retained and paid for until as late as 1847. From his return from Glasgow in June, 1843, he seems, with the exception of a plunge now and then into some unascertainable lodging in Edinburgh, to have resided steadily at Lasswade. And not without reason. His eldest son, Horace, having gone into the army as an officer in the 28th Cameronians, had died in China, of malarious fever, in the end of 1842, after having served in the Chinese campaign under Sir Hugh Gough; his third son, Paul Frederick, had gone out to India as an officer in the 70th Queen's Regiment; and his second son, Francis, was in Manchester for the time, as clerk in a commercial house. The three daughters being thus all of the family left at Lasswade, De Quincey was bound to be with them as much as possible. Nothing can be prettier than his account to Miss Mitford of their life there together and his description of his daughters. "They live," he says, "in the most absolute harmony I have ever witnessed. Such a sound as that of dissension in any shade or degree I have not once heard issuing from their lips. And it gladdens me beyond measure that all day long I hear from their little drawing-room intermitting sounds of

gaiety and laughter, the most natural and spontaneous. Three sisters more entirely loving to each other, and more unaffectedly drawing their daily pleasures from sources that will always continue to lie in their power, viz., books and music, I have not either known or heard of." So through 1844, 1845, and 1846, but with the variation caused in the household by the return, in 1845, of the son Francis from Manchester, to exchange his prospects in commerce for the study of medicine at the University of Edinburgh. The exchange was not without its difficulties, for the young man had to walk from Lasswade to Edinburgh every day to attend the classes; but it gave De Quincey the pleasant additional occupation of inquiring into his son's progress and coaching him for some of his examinations. Then there were pleasant acquaintanceships with some of the Lasswade neighbours, with drives now and then of the father and daughters to town together, and the still more frequent reception of friends and admirers of De Quincey who made their way to Lasswade to pay him their respects. In 1847 there was another long absence in Glasgow, extending from January to October. During part of the time his daughters were on a visit, the first in their lives, to their father's surviving relatives in the West of England; and some letters of his show a lively interest in their reported movements amid the scenes and persons that had been so familiar to himself in his earlier days, and a special pleasure in the fact that they had met Mr. Walter Savage Landor. Through 1848 and 1849 all the family were together again at Lasswade, with no other break in the routine there than might be caused by De Quincey's incurable passion for hiding himself at his option now and then in some Edinburgh lodging.

An important matter all this while, as in every pre-

ceeding period of De Quincey's existence, had been the state of his health. It may be doubted whether the majority of those interested in him have had any adequate conception of that extreme fragility of body, that complexity of bodily pains and ailments, with which, even apart from the opium, he had to contend all his life. Connected with his main malady—that malady into which all his inherited or acquired ailments had coalesced and settled from an early stage of his youth, and which the medical authorities are disposed to define as “gastrodynia,” or severe gastric neuralgia, accompanied by “a low, inflammatory condition of the mucous coat of the stomach, proceeding at times to ulceration”—there was a specific inability to live by the ordinary forms of nutriment. His teeth had gone; he “did not know what it was to eat a dinner:” his message in 1847 to an old school-fellow, by way of jocular apology for never having renewed their old acquaintance by letter, was that he had not once dined “since shaking hands with him in the eighteenth century.” A little soup, tea, cocoa, coffee, or other fluid, with a sop of bread, or more rarely an inch or two of mutton or hare, kept to the extreme of tenderness, and cut finically for easy mastication, formed De Quincey's diet. In the management even of this there was incessant cause of nervous irritation. Add the glooms and phrenzies growing out of the indulgence in opium to which he had so long been habituated. In this matter there had been ups and downs within our present period, according to the varying degrees of his suffering from his independent malady, but also according to the fluctuations of his reasonings for and against the drug. The chief crisis, marked as such by De Quincey himself in a kind of diary of notes and jottings at the time, had been in the

year 1844. In some new access of accumulated wretchedness, mental and physical, when a horror of the most hideous blackness seemed once more to be "travelling over the disc of his life," he had rioted again with the fiend and exulted in 5000 daily drops of the liquid damnation. The rebound towards self-retrieval, as it is chronicled in his jottings, had cost him efforts incredible. He had experimented in reductions of the dose, and even in the torture of total abstinence; and, his feet having failed him for his ordinary pedestrian exercise in the roads between Lasswade and Edinburgh, he had compelled himself to shuffle round and round the garden of his Lasswade cottage in a measured circuit of forty-four yards, so as to accomplish in that way his ten miles a day. Unexpectedly, these efforts had succeeded; and, with an allowance ranging from 100 drops a day upwards, he had recovered in 1844 the faculty of living on. In 1848 there had been another crisis, but less formidable; and from that date, we are given to understand, his wrestlings with opium were at an end. Having ascertained the very minimum of the drug on which existence was endurable in his own case, he kept to that as much as possible through the rest of his life, and saw no use in troubling himself with further experimentation.

De Quincey's literary labours during the nine years had still been chiefly in contributions to *Blackwood* and *Tait*. To *Blackwood* his chief contributions had been as follows: In 1841, *The Secret Societies of Asia*, *Plato's Republic*, *Traits and Tendencies of German Literature* (?), *Homer and the Homeridæ* (three parts); in 1842, *Philosophy of Herodotus*, *The Pagan Oracles*, *Cicero*, *Ricardo Made Easy* (three parts), *Benjamin of Tudela* (?); in 1844, *Greece under the Romans*; in 1845, *Coleridge and*

Opium-eating and *Suspiria de Profundis*, being a Sequel to the *Confessions of an Opium-eater* (three successive articles, with sub-titles); and, in 1849, *The English Mail-coach* and *The Vision of Sudden Death*. To Tait there seem to have been no contributions between 1841 and 1845; but in this latter year the series in that magazine was renewed in an article on *Wordsworth's Poetry*, followed by another *On the Temperance Movement*, and by several papers under the general title of *Notes on Gillfillan's Gallery of Literary Portraits*. These last, treating of Godwin, Hazlitt, Shelley, Keats, &c., were continued into 1846—in which year also appeared two papers on *The Antigone of Sophocles*, occasioned by a dramatic performance at Edinburgh by Miss Helen Faucit; two on *Christianity Considered as an Organ of Political Movement*, one entitled *Glance at the Works of Mackintosh*, and one entitled *System of the Heavens as Revealed by Lord Rosse's Telescope*. To these succeeded, in 1847, *Notes on Walter Savage Landor*, *Joan of Arc* (two papers), *Schlosser's Literary History of the Eighteenth Century*, *Milton versus Southey and Landor*, *Orthographic Mutineers*, *The Spanish Military Nun* (three papers), and two papers on *Protestantism*, completed by a third in February, 1848. When we add that De Quincey had some connexion during a portion of the nine years with a Glasgow newspaper, and that his *Logic of Political Economy* (now included in his *Collected Works*) was first published in separate book-form by Messrs Blackwood in 1844, it will be seen that his literary industry through the period had continued very vigorous and undiminished. Through the greater part of the nine years the chief stimulus, as before, had been actual need of money; but, towards the end of the period there had been a consider-

able abatement of the urgency of this particular motive by the falling in of legacies from his uncle, his mother, or other relatives. Particulars are not given; but one infers, from hints in the published family letters, that the year 1847 was a marked turning-point of relief for the brain-worn veteran in this respect.

The brain-worn veteran! The phrase does not imply that there were yet any signs in him of mental decrepitude. On the contrary, as the titles of some of the articles in the last paragraph will have suggested, the sexagenarian De Quincey was still in full perfection of his wonderful powers. Whatever might have been the case seventeen years before, when he first settled permanently in Edinburgh, it would have been no wonder now if the community of that city had learnt to think of him as one of the few worthiest among them *digito monstrari* as he passed in their streets. It had not come quite to that length in De Quincey's case—the peculiar nature of his celebrity not making him liable to any such rush of popular and daylight recognition as gathered round Wilson or Chalmers, but coupling him rather with such a similar recluse and late burner of the lamp as the philosophic Hamilton. Still, for all in Edinburgh who had any special passion for literature, or thought they had, De Quincey from 1845 onwards was most emphatically one of the "characters" of the place. He was talked of and gossiped about at dinner-tables and tea-tables, and to see him, even by stratagem, was worth an effort. As it was the chance of the present writer to be in the vicinity for a part of the precise time mentioned (from December, 1844, to May, 1847), he will here set down, as authentically as he can, first what he then heard, and next what trifle he saw, of the little local wonder.

The rumours about De Quincey were invariably to the effect that his eccentricity, his difference from other mortals, passed all bounds of belief or conception. The form of his eccentricity generally reported first was the absolute uncertainty of his whereabouts at that particular time, arising from his evasiveness on the subject of his lodgings when he was last seen, or intimation from him that, having changed his lodgings, he was in the distressing predicament of having an adversary in pursuit of him in the shape of a former landlady. This suspiciousness of being pursued had become an ingrained habit of De Quincey's mind, and accounted for much of his conduct. It connected itself with his astounding incompetence in money matters. In that department of practice the abstract political economist, so profound in Ricardo, was helpless as an infant. He gave away money right and left when he had it, and was then the prince of almoners for sorners and beggars; but he was constantly running aground himself. The reports of him in this respect agreed pretty uniformly in the idea that his difficulties did not necessarily arise from want of money, but only, or often, from want of a particular sum required at a particular moment, and inability in all ordinary processes for converting the potential into the actual. Mr. Hill Burton gives an Edinburgh illustration of about our present date which reminds one of Mr. Charles Knight's story of the bank-draft in London in the year 1825. One night very late, he tells us, De Quincey, arriving at a friend's door, and having obtained admission with difficulty, explained, with all the skill and pathos of his beautiful rhetoric, that it was absolutely essential he should be provided at once with 7s. 6d. On perceiving surprise on his friend's face, he proceeded to explain that he had a document in his possession the transference of

which to his friend's care would probably obviate his hesitation; and then, after rummaging in his pockets, and fetching a miscellany of small articles out of them, he produced at last a crumpled piece of paper, which he tendered as security. It was a 50*l.* note; and his friend's impression was that, if he had kept the note in exchange for the 7*s.* 6*d.*, he would have heard no more of the transaction, and indeed that, before coming to his door, De Quincey had been trying to negotiate the exchange at a series of shops, and had failed only through extreme scepticism on the part of the shopkeepers. From these reports of the mysteriousness of De Quincey's usual whereabouts, and his tendency to come to light only occasionally in the straits of some dilemma, it was a natural inference that a meeting with him in any ordinary social way was not a matter of easy arrangement. A promise from him, you were told, was of no use: the party might meet, expecting him; but, ten to one, De Quincey would not be there. There was, however, a science of the ways and means of getting at De Quincey; in which science, according to experts, the method of surest efficacy was to commission some one to find him out and bring him. Then, if precaution made escape impossible, he would come meekly and unresistingly. But in what guise would he come? What a question for endless speculation this was may be guessed from Mr. Hill Burton's account of his appearance at one important dinner-party, to which he had been lured by such deep-laid pretences that he came without convoy. "The festivities of the afternoon are far on when a commotion is heard in the hall as if some dog or other stray animal had forced his way in. The instinct of a friendly guest tells him of the arrival: he opens the door and fetches in the little stranger. What can it be? A street

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boy of some sort? His costume, in fact, is a boy's duffle great-coat, very threadbare, with a hole in it, and buttoned tight to the chin, where it meets the fragments of a parti-coloured belcher handkerchief; on his feet are list shoes, covered with snow, for it is a stormy winter night; and the trousers!—some one suggests that they are mere linen garments blackened with writing-ink, but that Papaverius never would have been at the trouble so to disguise them. What can be the theory of such a costume? The simplest thing in the world—it consisted of the fragments of apparel nearest at hand. Had chance thrown to him a court single-breasted coat, with a bishop's apron, a kilt, and top-boots, in these he would have made his entry." Dressed in whatever fashion, he was still De Quincey, and you were glad to have him. For as to the magic of his talk, its sweet and subtle ripple of anecdote and suggestion, its witching splendour when he rose to his highest, the reports were unanimous and enthusiastic. No conceivable intellectual treat, you were told, was equal to a fortunate evening with De Quincey. Only, you were pretty sure to hear, there might be one drawback. Whether from the stimulus of opium or not, he was apt to be at his best when it was rapidly becoming to-morrow and his companions had to think of going. Having got your De Quincey, you might thus find yourself face to face with the problem how to get rid of him. Generally it solved itself by his going at last with the rest, steering himself no one knew whither through the starlight or darkness; but sometimes, you were told, on polite inducement, he would remain where he was, and then the visit of an evening might extend itself to unknown dimensions.

Such were the reports one heard about De Quincey before seeing him. My own few glimpses of him, I am bound

to add, did not present him to me in any such extreme of helplessness as the reports had prepared me to expect. Here are the facts, as I have already printed them elsewhere: "The first time I saw De Quincey was most pleasantly one evening in a room high up in one of the tall houses of the Old Town. He came in charge of a strong, determined man, who took all the necessary trouble. There were but few present, and all went on nicely. In addition to the general impression of diminutiveness and fragility, one was struck with the peculiar beauty of his head and forehead, rising disproportionately high over his small, wrinkly visage and gentle, deep-set eyes. In his talk, which was in the form of really harmonious and considerate colloquy, and not at all in that of monologue, I remember chiefly two incidents. The birthday of some one present having been mentioned, De Quincey immediately said, 'Oh, that is the anniversary of the battle of So-and-so;' and he seemed ready to catch as many birthdays as might be thrown him on the spot, and almanac them all round in a similar manner from his memory. The other incident was his use of a phrase very beautiful in itself, and which seemed characteristic of his manner of thinking. Describing some visionary scene or other, he spoke of it as consisting of 'discs of light and interspaces of gloom;' and I noticed that, with all the fine distinctness of the phrase, both optical and musical, it came from him with no sort of consciousness of its being out of the way in talk, and with no reference whatever to its being appreciated or not by those around him, but simply because, whoever might be listening, he would be thinking as De Quincey. That evening passed; and, though I saw him once or twice again, it is the last sight of him that I remember next best. It must have been, I think, in 1846, on a summer

afternoon. A friend, a stranger in Edinburgh, was walking with me in one of the pleasant, quiet country lanes near the town. Meeting us, and the sole moving thing in the lane besides ourselves, came a small figure, not untidily dressed, but with his hat pushed up far in front over his forehead, and hanging on his hind-head, so that the back rim must have been resting on his coat-collar. At a little distance I recognised it to be De Quincey; but, not considering myself entitled to interrupt his meditations, I only whispered the information to my friend, that he might not miss what the look at such a celebrity was worth. So we passed him, giving him the wall. Not unnaturally, however, after he passed, we turned round for the pleasure of a back view of the wee intellectual wizard. Whether my whisper and our glances had alarmed him, as a ticket-of-leave man might be rendered uneasy in his solitary walk by the scrutiny of two passing strangers, or whether he had some recollection of me (which was likely enough, as he seemed to forget nothing), I do not know; but we found that he too had stopped and was looking round at us. Apparently scared at being caught doing so, he immediately wheeled round again and hurried his pace towards a side-turning from the lane, into which he disappeared, his hat still hanging on the back of his head. That was my last sight of De Quincey."

Those walks of De Quincey in the environs of Edinburgh ought to linger still among the memories of the legend-loving town. The particular walk just mentioned was in daylight, and the meeting was in the quiet lane or road by which, avoiding the great Dean Road, one wends towards the Corstorphines and Craigerook. Jeffrey was then alive, and resident at Craigerook; but it is quite impossible that De Quincey had been calling on Jeffrey. His

walks were in all directions, for his own purposes of exercise or recreation only, and at his own sweet will. By preference also, and in the proportion of many to one, the longest of them were nocturnal. It is strange yet to think of the little figure in those weary wanderings of his round and through the city evening after evening, now on his way from Lasswade inwards over the darkening heights and hollows to the Old Town, now along the glittering chasm of Princes Street or the gloomier regularity of George Street, now down by the northern suburbs to the levels of the Firth at Granton, now by a daring meander eastwards to the deserted ghastliness of Leith Pier and the skeleton array of masts and shipping, and always, or often, with the penance of the returning zigzag somehow to Lasswade and the cottage on the Esk. It was his custom, we are told, in these nocturnal rambles, and chiefly for his convenience in certain intricate labyrinths of pathway about the Esk, with a foot-bridge or two in them, to carry a small lantern, with the means of lighting it when he chose. What a trial to the nerves of the hardiest belated tramp, or other night-bird, with any dread of the supernatural, to have come upon De Quincey in such a spot, striking his match by a bush, or advancing through the trees with his bull's-eye! He himself was perfectly fearless of night-bird or demon. Night was his natural element; what could it bring forth that should alarm *him*? Sometimes, we are informed, though without production of the evidence, he would not care to return home at all, but would lie down for rest and shelter anywhere. Edinburgh, therefore, in preserving her legends about the De Quincey who honoured her with so much of his life, has to remember, it seems, unless rumour has been too inventive, that not only were his footsteps familiar with every

mile of road round her, but sometimes he would bivouac in a wayside wood in her neighbourhood, or on a spur of the Braids or the Pentlands, canopied only by the constellations.

The danger is that, in dwelling so much on the eccentricities of De Quincey, it should be forgotten that all the while the cottage at Lasswade was really his home. It was there that he would have been detained always by those dearest to him; and it was there, in fact, with all allowance for his wanderings and fugitations, that he did spend most of his time. Very soon, if left to himself, he would have taken possession of every room in the house, one after another, and "snowed up" each with his papers; but, that having been gently prevented, he had one room to work in all day and all night to his heart's content. The evenings, or the intervals between his daily working-time and his nightly working-time or stroll, he generally spent in the drawing-room with his daughters, either alone or in company with any friends that chanced to be with him. At such times, we are told, he was unusually charming. "The newspaper was brought out, and he, telling in his own delightful way, rather than reading, the news, would, on questions from this one or that one of the party, often including young friends of his children, neighbours, or visitors from distant places, illuminate the subject with such a wealth of memories, of old stories, of past or present experiences, of humour, of suggestion, even of prophecy, as by its very wealth makes it impossible to give any taste of it." The description is by one of his daughters; and she adds a touch which is inimitable in its fidelity and tenderness. "He was not," she says, "a re-assuring man for nervous people to live with, as those nights were exceptions on which he did not set something on fire, the com-

monest incident being for some one to look up from book or work to say casually, *Papa, your hair is on fire*; of which a calm *Is it, my love?* and a hand rubbing out the blaze was all the notice taken." The music, which was so frequently a part of those in-door pleasures, and the variations of the character of the evenings now and then by the presence of distinguished visitors, British or American, may easily be imagined. What has chiefly to be borne in mind, we repeat, is that, at the centre of all De Quincey's Bohemian roamings, real and reputed, there was this home of warmth and comfort for him on the banks of the Esk, and that it may be seen by those who feel an interest in him to this day. The quickest way is to take the rail from Edinburgh to the Polton station; but the best is to go to Lasswade, and thence to walk the mile and a half extra that bring one to the spot.

CHAPTER X.

LASSWADE, AND NO. 42 LOTHIAN STREET, EDINBURGH.—THE
COLLECTED WORKS.—LAST DAYS OF DE QUINCEY.

[1849-1859.]

IN 1845 there had been started, by Mr. James Hogg, an enterprising Edinburgh bookseller, a new cheap periodical, called *Hogg's Weekly Instructor*. The periodical had been going on for three years, and had entered on a "new series" in 1843. It was in the autumn of 1849, when some accident had caused the removal of the printing-offices to temporary premises in the suburb of Edinburgh called Canonmills, that Mr. Hogg, attending to some matters there, was told that a stranger wanted to speak to him. "Going down," says Mr. Hogg, "I was confronted by a noticeably small figure, attired in a capacious garment, which was much too large, and which served the purpose of both undercoat and overcoat." It was, in fact, De Quincey, who had come to offer an article for the *Instructor*. Mr. Hogg, having ascertained who his visitor was, very naturally accepted the article at once; whereupon it was produced from an inner pocket of the capacious great-coat, and handed to Mr. Hogg, but not till De Quincey had produced from the same pocket a small hand-brush and carefully brushed the manuscript. Finding he had come all the way from Lasswade, Mr. Hogg asked him how he was to get back. He would walk, as usual, he

said. It was now about six o'clock, and he would be home before nine.

This call on Mr. Hogg at Canonmills turned out of no small importance in De Quincey's biography. Whether it had been occasioned by any knowledge on De Quincey's part that his connexion with *Blackwood* and *Tait* was coming to an end, or merely by a wish to have a weekly periodical also at hand for the reception of smaller odds and ends from his pen, certain it is that from 1849 the new connexion all but superseded every other. There are no known contributions by De Quincey to *Blackwood* after 1849. His only known contribution to *Tait* after that date was a paper in three instalments, in 1851, entitled *Lord Carlisle on Pope*; and, though *The North British Review* is said to have counted De Quincey among its contributors, his literary exertions in any such quarter were but asides from his occupations for Mr. Hogg. Not, of course, that these occupations consisted in mere contribution to *Hogg's Instructor*. That periodical—whether under its original name, which it retained till 1856, or under the more appalling name of *Titan*, which it adopted in 1857—did indeed receive bright occasional contributions from De Quincey. The most notable were a short sketch of *Professor Wilson*, in 1850; an article on *Sir William Hamilton*, in three portions, in 1852; a paper on *California*, in 1852; and one on *China*, in 1857. But what were a few stray articles in an Edinburgh weekly for the last ten years of such a life as De Quincey's? How had it come to pass, in fact, that a man for whose articles all editors and all publishers in the British Islands, had they been really deep in their craft, ought to have been competing, had found it necessary, in his sixty-fifth year, to pay that call at Canonmills with a manuscript in his

poCKET, and solicit, almost as a mendicant, the acceptance of it for the columns of a struggling Edinburgh weekly? That mystery resolves itself into the more general mystery of the origin of stupidity; but the call at Canonmills had at least one result more fortunate than the opening for De Quincey of another small source of wages by periodical-writing in his old age. Mr. Hogg, having to see his new contributor again and again, conceived a possible expansion of their connexion. Why should he not bring out, under De Quincey's own editorial supervision, a collective edition of De Quincey's Works? True, it had been announced that the scheme had been already entertained in some quarters and given up as hopeless; true, it was the uniform representation to Mr. Hogg by his brothers in business that, if he did begin the enterprise with De Quincey's consent, it would break down after a volume or two, through De Quincey's unpunctuality and incapacity for continuous labour. "I will risk it," said Mr. Hogg to himself; and he did. It seems to have been in 1850 that the resolution was taken, though the preparations were not begun till some time later.

Meanwhile the same idea had occurred to the American publishing firm of Messrs. Ticknor & Fields, of Boston. In America, almost always in advance of the mother-country in such matters, it had been perceived long ago that De Quincey was one of the chief English classics. There had been popular American reprints already of individual pieces of his; and it was Mr. Fields himself that now undertook the task of seeking out his scattered articles in British periodicals and collecting and arranging them in proper form. For this first American edition of De Quincey's works—begun in 1851, and completed in 1855, in twenty volumes—the publishers obtained some assistance

from De Quincey while it was in progress; and it is remembered to their credit that they made him a participator in the profits to a handsome extent. The Boston edition of the works, however, was not to interfere with Mr. Hogg's projected Edinburgh edition; which, indeed, was to differ from the Boston edition very considerably. Less complete in some respects, inasmuch as De Quincey was to omit from it articles that are kept in the Boston edition, and was to diminish the bulk of the matter on certain subjects by fusing separate articles in some cases into one, it was, on the other hand, to be more perfect, in so far as it was to receive the author's own revision throughout, with modifications and extensions in the course of the revision.

To get rid of that matter at once, it may be stated that when the first volume of the Edinburgh edition did appear in 1853, it appeared as the first volume of a series the general title of which was to be *Selections Grave and Gay, from writings published and unpublished, by Thomas De Quincey*, and that this general title was maintained till the issue of the fourteenth volume of the series (the last to which it was carried by Mr. Hogg) in 1860. On the whole, it is to be regretted now that De Quincey did not, for this edition, simply collect his writings, and publish them in the chronological order of their first appearance or their composition, with a note of date and place to each. Next best would have been an assortment of the papers into sets of volumes according to a classification of their subjects. No one was more capable of such a classification than De Quincey; but, unfortunately, he had no complete preserved collection of his printed papers by him, or of the periodicals containing them. The American edition, coming over to him in successive volumes,

was his greatest help; but, till it was complete, and sometimes even then, he had to rummage for his old papers, or employ Mr. Hogg to rummage for him, hurriedly squeezing together what was readiest at intervals, to make up a volume when the press became ravenous. Hence the most provoking jumble in the contents of the fourteen volumes—mixed kinds of matter in the same volume, and dispersion of the same kinds of matter over volumes wide apart, and yet all with a pretence of grouping and with factitious sub-titles invented for the separate volumes on the spur of the moment. Much of this has been remedied in the later issues of the same Edinburgh edition by Messrs. A. & C. Black, who acquired the property in 1862. Two volumes have been added by Messrs. Black to the previous fourteen, and other alterations have been made by them, justifying the exchange of the title *Selections Grave and Gay, &c.*, for the more comprehensive title *De Quincey's Works*.

The new labour of bringing out the Collected Works occasioned a change in De Quincey's domiciliary arrangements. It may be remembered that from 1838 to 1840, or just after his wife's death and before the happy notion of the cottage at Lasswade, his Edinburgh lodging or working head-quarters had been at No. 42 Lothian Street. There seems reason for believing that, though he had been in a variety of lodging-places in the interval, he had always preferred this. At all events, in 1852, when he was in the throes of the first volume of the Collected Works, there was a return to No. 42 Lothian Street, and this time, as it turned out, for so permanent a tenancy that no house in Edinburgh now can compete with that in the interest of its associations with De Quincey.

Lothian Street, the stranger to Edinburgh may be in-

formed, is a dense street of shops and rather dingy houses, in the Old Town, close to the University; and No. 42, like most of the other houses, is what is called in Edinburgh "a common stair." In other words, it is a tenement entered from the street by an arched passage, from which a stone staircase ascends to the several half-flats into which the whole is divided, each with its independent door and door-bell. There are six such half-flats above the ground-floor; and that in which De Quincey had his rooms was the left half-flat on the second floor. The half-flat was then, as it had been at the time of De Quincey's first familiarity with it, in the occupation of a widowed Mrs. Wilson and her sister, Miss Stark. They were two most worthy persons, who had come to have some appreciation of the extraordinary character of their lodger; and they were from this time forward to take the most exemplary charge of him. It is an additional satisfaction to know that, soon after they had taken charge of him, and chiefly by Mr. Hogg's friendly exertions, he was disentangled from all his supposed perplexities with other landladies and lodging-house keepers. Mr. Hogg's statements on this point, a vital one in De Quincey's biography, are worth remembering. Having, with some difficulty, obtained the necessary information from him, and permission to act in his name, Mr. Hogg did find that deposits of papers had been left by him in various places. In the main, however, he found that De Quincey's dread that he could be pursued on account of claims so arising was a mere hallucination. Two former landladies came of their own accord, and with perfect good-nature, to deliver up to Mr. Hogg, without any claim whatever, papers of the strange little gentleman who had lodged with them; in a third case, where a claim for house-room was presented, which

troubled De Quincey for some time, it was so clearly exorbitant that it might have been quashed at once but for De Quincey's anxiety about the safety of his papers; and the most flagrant case of all was one in which a whole family trafficked on their possession of papers of De Quincey's as a means of extorting money from him, though not professing that he owed them a farthing. They played on his fears for his papers, doling them out in parcels, and sometimes sending him "bogus-packets," made up of anything; they pleaded abject poverty, and appealed to his pity; and at least once they got up a death in the family that he might have the pleasure of contributing to the funeral expenses. The note sent to De Quincey on this occasion, and forwarded by him to Mr. Hogg, is a curiosity. "Mr. De Quincey, sir," it begins; "in accordance with your request I have made out the enclosed items, money for which I would want for my mother's funeral. She is to be buried to-morrow, and would like things settled as early as possible to-day." Mr. Hogg having taken the wretches in hand, they were brought under some sort of control; but there is a trace of trouble from them to as late as 1855.—Two more of Mr. Hogg's stories about De Quincey relate to the same matter of his ubiquitously-scattered papers. Once, in a hotel in High Street, into which he had taken De Quincey for refuge and a basin of soup during a thunder-shower, the waiter, after looking at De Quincey, said, "I think, sir, I have a bundle of papers which you left here some time ago;" and, sure enough, a bundle was produced, which De Quincey had left there about a year before. Another time, having gone to Glasgow once more on a visit to Professor Lushington, and having taken two tea-chests of papers with him, he had been obliged, by some refractoriness on the part of the

porter, to leave them at a bookseller's shop on their way to the Professor's house. This he remembered perfectly; but, as he had taken no note of the name of the bookseller, or the number of the shop, or even of the name of the street, Mr. Hogg found him quite rueful on the subject after his return to Edinburgh. A letter to a friend and a round of inquiries among the Glasgow booksellers made all right; and Mr. Hogg had the pleasure of pointing out to him the two recovered boxes as they lay in his office, and asking what was to be done with them. "Send them to Lothian Street," was the answer; and thither they were accordingly sent—an addition to the vast aggregate of books, periodicals, and newspapers, in mounds on the floor and in tiers along the walls, already crammed into his rooms, and vexing the orderly souls of Mrs. Wilson and Miss Stark.

A worrying, and yet most amusing, business it was for Mr. Hogg to keep De Quincey, in those rooms, or in his occasional adjournments to Lasswade, to his great task of bringing out, with due punctuality, the successive volumes of his *Collected Works*. It was one long struggle between De Quincey and the printing-press. A message-boy, named Roderick, was kept always ready at the one end, to be shot to Lothian Street or Lasswade for copy when the supply failed; at the other end was De Quincey himself, groaning and working. His preserved notes to Mr. Hogg, excusing his failures and delays, are pathetically characteristic. "My non-performances after circumstantial notice have been so many," he says in one, "that I can hardly hope for any credit when I tell you that on Monday I shall be in Lothian Street with the MS. all ready for the press." The excuse on this occasion was his "nervous sufferings;" but another time it is trouble about some unpaid taxes,

and consequent "agitation at the prospect of utter ruin past all repair." Again, it is uncertainty whether certain papers are already in the printer's hands, or are still in his own possession, with a desire to be sure on the point, so as to be saved, if possible, "a process of stooping" in search of them, from which he could "hardly recover for a fortnight." Once it is owing to "lumbago;" once to his having fallen asleep inopportunately; another time to partial delirium from "want of sleep and opium combined;" another time to distraction from "having been up and writing all night," with the addition, "I have just set fire to my hair." Once the delay is due to "a process of whitewashing or otherwise cleaning ceilings, &c.," which has been going on in the house, and to the unfortunate fact that most of the papers needed at the moment "had been placed within a set of drawers against which is now reared the whitewasher's scaffolding;" and several times it is owing to consideration for Miss Stark, who is not in the best of health, and has too much to do. Miss Stark, in fact, had become indispensable to him, not only buying for him all the articles he wanted, articles of apparel included, but also receiving and returning messages for him, and sorting and numbering his slips of copy, and so minutely cognisant of his daily dealings and difficulties with the press that she began to fancy she was herself a kind of literary lady.¹ It is curious to observe, amid all this

¹ Miss Stark is still alive, and in the same No. 42 Lothian Street; and I have had the pleasure of seeing her, and hearing her talk of De Quincey, in the very rooms which he occupied. She remembers that he usually wrote on papers which he held in his left hand, near his eyes, and not at a table, and also that he had a peculiar way of notching each slip of manuscript when he had done with it. He had a secret meaning in the practice, which he promised to tell her; but

confusion, the indefatigable and painstaking laboriousness of the little workman, his fastidious care for accuracy, and his delicate regard for the feelings and interests of other people. His notes of excuse are themselves models of superfluous precision; and his instructions to the compositors for corrections of the press and for the proper reading of his manuscript are elaborately over-cautions. He is unhappy sometimes at the thought that the compositors, whose time is their fortune, may be standing idle through his fault; and once he is miserable till he has explained to Mr. Hogg by two letters in succession that the boy Roderick is not to blame for a certain misunderstanding, but had delivered his message with Spartan strictness. Nor, in the long-run, as Mr. Hogg vouches, did De Quincey fail in any essential of his undertaking. In the accounts between them he was equally scrupulous, and indeed morbidly afraid of any benefit to himself by a casual error. It was not long before Mr. Hogg found that a cheque made him uneasy, and that he would always rather have a little cash on account. From another source we learn that he did not like the greasy Scotch one-pound notes, but preferred the medallions of her Majesty's head in gold, silver, or copper.

While No. 42 Lothian Street was De Quincey's established abode and workshop from 1852 onwards, it was at Lasswade, as before, that he was mainly or solely to be seen by visitors. The domestic economy there, however, did not remain unchanged. In 1853 there was the first break in the household by the marriage of his eldest daughter, Margaret, to Mr. Robert Craig, the son of a highly-respected neighbour, and the removal of the he never did. She does not remember that he went out much at nights, or indeed during the day, except for transit to Lasswade.

married pair to Ireland. In 1854 the two younger daughters were away from Lasswade for some time, on a visit to their married sister in her new home; and in 1855 the elder of these, Florence, went out to India, to become the wife of Colonel Baird Smith, an Engineer officer of high distinction, whose name and services are still brilliant in our Indian annals. As by that time the medical son, Francis, had become a duly-qualified physician and gone out to Brazil, De Quincey seems to have felt some compunction afterwards in leaving his single remaining daughter, Emily, so much alone at Lasswade. There were pathetic signs of this, Mrs. Baird Smith informs us, in the increased frequency thenceforward of his affectionate notes and letters from Lothian Street to Lasswade when he could not come himself; and her explanation of the whole matter is: "He really could not manage his work farther from the press, and nothing which would have been natural in other cases, such as my sister's removing into Edinburgh, would have answered with him." Indeed, though Miss De Quincey's most natural home was still the pretty place on the Esk to which she had been accustomed from her childhood, and where, rather than in Edinburgh, she had pleasant neighbourly ties, she was inevitably absent from it a good deal, after 1855, on visits elsewhere, more especially to her sister, Mrs. Craig, in Ireland. In one such visit, in the autumn of 1857, De Quincey himself actually accompanied her—the arrival just then of his youngest son, Paul Frederick, on furlough from his regiment in India, having suggested the journey and made the travelling arrangements easier. Even with such an escort, it was something of an adventure for De Quincey in his seventy-third year; but all was managed to his mind; and there was a new fund of delight for

him through the rest of his life in the fact that he had made out this visit to his eldest daughter in her Irish home, and had *seen* the two little ones that were to remember him as their grandfather. From that date there was to be no similar interruption of his usual habits, but only, whenever his youngest daughter was at Lasswade, the customary alternation between the familiar cottage there and his own crib in Lothian Street. Even after he had passed his seventieth year he retained so much of his pedestrian vigour that the distance of seven miles between the two places was nothing to him if he were in the humour, and younger men were surprised at the ease with which he preceded them up one of the braes of the Esk. Latterly, however, there was an increasing feebleness, bringing his rambles more and more within bounds, and sometimes confining him to his Lothian Street rooms for weeks together. A tendency to somnambulism, which showed itself now and then, was a new cause of trepidation on his account to Mrs. Wilson and Miss Stark, already sufficiently in dread of nightly accident to him and his papers from his extreme short-sightedness and perpetual contact with fire and lighted candles. On the other hand, one is glad to find, he was in his latter years comparatively free from the pains and miseries of his constitutional malady. The testimony to this fact is concurrent from several quarters; and the medical hypothesis now is, that the "lesion of the stomach" which had been the prime cause of his sufferings, and the explanation of his abnormal consumption of opium, had somehow begun to heal itself, by a kind of natural induration, as old age came on.

The De Quincey of the ten years from 1849 to 1859, the De Quincey whose voluminous Collected Works were

appearing simultaneously in a British edition and an American edition, was naturally an object of even keener social curiosity than the De Quincey of earlier and less rounded-off celebrity. He was thought of as a surviving chief of a former generation, whom one must make haste to see, if he were ever to be seen at all. For the Edinburgh people generally, however, to see De Quincey was no more easy matter now than it had been before. His elusiveness of all ordinary social gatherings had increased rather than diminished; and from that net-work of great dinner-parties and great evening assemblies which brings all Edinburgh together, over and over again, every season from November to May, he was still allowed to escape by a unanimous vote in favour of his intractable singularity. So long as Wilson lived, it was never the fault of that heartiest and most hospitable of men if he lost sight of De Quincey for any considerable while, or were not applied to first for any act of friendship, or of guardianship in a difficulty, that De Quincey might need. But Wilson died in April, 1854, at the age of sixty-nine, leaving his weaker-bodied friend, then of the same age, to live on for nearly six years more of lingering Edinburgh independence. Among friends of De Quincey's who saw most of him in his later years, before Wilson's death or after, were Mr. Robert Chambers, Mr. Hill Burton, Mr. Alexander Russel of the *Scotsman*, and Mr. J. R. Findlay. Those were still the days, too, of the pleasant little supper-parties of Mrs. Crowe in Darnaway Street, remembered yet by some, and certainly by the present writer, as among the most excellent and best-managed things of the kind ever known in Edinburgh or elsewhere. By the kindly tact of the hostess, one was always sure to meet at her table, in the easiest and friendliest fashion, from half a dozen to

ten or twelve of the men and women best worth knowing, on literary or other grounds, among the residents in Edinburgh or the last week's arrivals. As I write there rise up in my memory the genial old Sir William Allan and his niece, Mr. and Mrs. George Combe (the latter a daughter of Mrs. Siddons, and with a flash of her mother's dramatic power in her at unexpected moments), the good Robert Chambers, Dr. Samuel Brown, David Scott, Miss Rigby, Mrs. Stirling of Hill Street, the American Miss Cushman, the Italian Ruffini, and the Greek Mousabines. That is a mixed recollection from 1846; and it must have been considerably after that date, as I calculate, but while some of those named may have been still among the *contubernales*, that De Quincey was first drawn into the friendly circle. The following anecdote of one of his appearances there is, therefore, only at second-hand: To suit some of the gentlemen, there had been produced on this occasion, by special grace of the English hostess, materials for the savage Scottish observance called whisky-toddy. In those days the orthodox instrument for mixing the ingredients in the tumbler and conveying them thence to the glass was a "toddy-ladle," generally of silver, but preferably of wood. Mrs. Crowe having apologized for the absence of those articles and the substitution of mere teaspoons, De Quincey's politeness was moved to hyperbole. "Oh, don't mention it, Mrs. Crowe," he said; "don't mention it; for, if there is one thing in this world that I abominate more than any other, it is those execrable toddy-ladles." There must be De Quinceyana a thousand times better than this from some of the little *noctes* in Darnaway Street and elsewhere from 1849 onwards, if one could get at them. But almost all De Quincey's fellow-guests at such little gatherings are gone, as well as himself.

Any rare appearances, such as have been noted, of De Quincey at the table of an Edinburgh friend between 1849 and 1859 connect themselves, of course, with the Edinburgh focus of his little ellipse—*i. e.*, with Lothian Street. The more formal calls of visitors from a distance, British or American, were still almost invariably at Lasswade, and naturally became fewer and fewer after the marriages of two of his daughters and the absences of the third made his own occasions for being there less frequent. Miss Martineau visited him in 1852 while all his daughters were still with him. She went away charmed by the exceptionally sweet audibility of his voice as it reached her through her ear-trumpet, and she lived to write a posthumous estimate of him, which might have been written more worthily. Mr. Fields, his American publisher, visited him about the same time, and could not afterwards say enough of his gentleness and courtesy of manner and the delights of his conversation. Another American, who visited him in 1854, transmits an anecdote which is worth more than general eulogium. The talk at the table had begun to veer round somehow to the subject of Scotland and the Scotch, when De Quincey, as if waking from a reverie, observed to the visitors that, as the servant who waited was a Scotch girl, he would be particularly obliged if they would reserve anything severe they had to say about the Scottish religion for moments when she should be out of the room. By far the best account, however, of a visit to De Quincey at Lasswade in his later years is one by the Rev. Francis Jacox. The visit, which was in July, 1852, extended over some days, and included walks with De Quincey, as well as conversations with him in the cottage. Impressed, as everybody was, with De Quincey's wonderful courtesy, the "sensitive considerateness" of his

style of address to all about him, Mr. Jacox was particularly struck by the absence in him of that habit of monologue which is the usual fault of men celebrated for conversational power. He was as willing to listen as to talk. Naturally, however, most of the talk was left to *him*. There were times of torpor or dreaminess when he seemed incapable of anything; but a cup of coffee, or some less visible stimulus, would rouse him like magic. Then his talk would range over all possible topics, from the gayest and lightest to the highest. Mr. Jacox took note of some of his judgments in literary matters. He talked most affectionately of Wilson, who was then broken down in health. In speaking of Sir William Hamilton and his metaphysics his strain rose to nearly its highest mood, but with a reserve on behalf of the later thinker, Ferrier, as perhaps the subtler, if not so learned and comprehensive. He had read Isaac Taylor's works, but did not care much about them. With Miss Edgeworth's novels he had much fault to find; Dickens he praised only *cum grano*, but preferred unhesitatingly to Thackeray, on account of his more genial humanity; and against Thackeray's merits, Mr. Jacox thought, he was mulishly obdurate. He would not admire Emerson and Hawthorne to the proper pitch, but had not then read the best of Hawthorne. He showed very considerable curiosity about Maurice and Kingsley, and Christian Socialism, and inquired very particularly about Mr. G. H. Lewes and his London doings and employments. He said that music was a necessity of his daily life, and that, if he ever visited London again, the Opera would be his principal attraction. For the theatres in general he had little good to say, and declared that he could hardly conceive of a performance of a Shakspearian tragedy that should be other than a profanation in his

eyes; but he spoke with cordial admiration of Miss Helen Faucit as he had seen her recently in Edinburgh in the part of Antigone. When such conversations with De Quincey were out-of-doors, in the country-roads about Lasswade, Mr. Jacox observed that they were always beset or followed by beggars, and that De Quincey gave something at once to every applicant, and always deferentially and with apology. The last walk Mr. Jacox had with him was in seeing him so far on his way back, on an evening, from Edinburgh to Lasswade. While they were in Princes Street, De Quincey showed a nervous anxiety lest any gesture of himself or his companion should be construed by a cabman as an offer of a fare, and so bring him off the rank. Some horrible experience seemed to be in his mind, and he expressed his dread of "the overbearing brutality of those men." The walk, so far as it was a joint concern, ended at a point in the Meadows, where De Quincey insisted that Mr. Jacox should turn back. Mr. Jacox then bade him farewell, but watched his receding figure as it disappeared up the lane, called Lovers' Loan, leading from the Meadows to the rest of his long route over height and hollow to Lasswade. He had opened a book of Hawthorne's, which Mr. Jacox had given him, and was reading it.

What more is to be known about De Quincey in his last years is to be derived chiefly from those letters to his daughters which, as has been mentioned, became touchingly frequent after the family had been dispersed. Mr. Page has been able to publish a number of specimens, and they have a very lively interest. It cannot be said, indeed, that they admit us much to that "inner heart" of De Quincey the real nature of which so puzzled those who knew him best. With all his startling outside eccentricities, and

even the glaring candours of his opium confessions, he remained an impenetrable being. Wilson himself could never explain him. What dark little core of a soul did his eccentricities conceal; or was there no real core of moral personality at all, but only a strange bunch or conformation of sensitive and intellectual nerves, over which the phenomena of the world could creep with the certainty of a keen response, and that could secrete thoughts and phantasies? The second supposition is irreconcilable with known facts. We have had signs already, and the writings furnish more in abundance, that the gentle, timid, shrinking, abnormally sensitive and polite little man was no more without his hard little bit of central self than other people, and that this might be found out on occasion. He had a very considerable fund of prejudice, temper, opinionativeness, animosity, pugnacity, on which he could draw when he liked; and sharp enough claws could be put forth from underneath the velvet. He had also, we need not doubt, his deeper hours and reveries of self-communing when De Quincey was alone with De Quincey, and more came out and was discoursed between them than friend or enemy could ever know. This mystery of the real De Quincey, however, has to be prosecuted through the whole biography and by means of the sum total of the materials, and receives little elucidation from the private letters.

But, though these letters tell us little about De Quincey intrinsically that we should not have known otherwise, they let us see some traits of his character in the light of a peculiarly pleasant familiarity. Their fatherly and grandfatherly fondness is really beautiful. We see the old man, late at night, in Lothian Street, amid his books and papers, stopping his work and pushing it aside, that

he may shut his eyes and think for a while of his three girls, and of the little Eva and Johnny in the Irish home of one of them. The arrival of the post with letters from his daughters is the event of the twenty-four hours within which it occurs, and he likes nothing better than to prattle back to them by the next post. Here, however, his difficulties, excuses, and explanations are often comically absurd. Now he fears he has mislaid the letters just received; now he has but a single sheet of note-paper left, or has to write on a sheet of wretchedly coarse note-paper from a packet he had fortunately bought at the last shop he could find open on a Saturday night; now—let his daughters exult with him!—he has “sprung a mine of envelopes” underneath the litter on his table, and will be at ease on that score for some time. Worst of all, it is quite uncertain whether the letter he is writing will ever be despatched; for he knows he has written one already, which he cannot now find, and this one may disappear in like fashion, unless fate is propitious. When a letter did emerge from such throttling chances in its origin, it was pretty sure to be worth receiving. With affectionate messages to the recipient and those about her, there might be chat about the progress of the Collected Edition of the Works, or about some incident in De Quincey’s last walk or in the Lothian Street *ménage*; but in most cases the letter turned itself into a playful little dissertation, *à la De Quincey*, on some point of etymology or literature casually suggested. Once there was a minute account of a dream in which himself and two of his daughters were the figures, with an illustrative diagram to assist them in conceiving it exactly. That De Quincey took no ordinary interest in the current public news of the day we know independently; but the letters furnish additional proofs.

We hear in them of second editions of the newspapers sent out for when anything of special moment was going on; and the amount of attention to the trial of Palmer in 1856 and to another famous case in 1857 answers to what we should expect from the author of the essay on "Murder Considered as one of the Fine Arts." Nothing, however, seems to have interested De Quincey so much, or roused him so nearly to a paroxysm of personal excitement, as the Indian Mutiny of 1857-'58. The fact that his daughter, Mrs. Baird Smith, and his son, Paul Frederick, were then in India, and subsequently his pride in the share which fell to his son-in-law, Colonel Baird Smith, in the exertions for the suppression of the Mutiny, brought the tremendous story home to him, and made the impression of it the last great experience of his life.

Through the years of labour over the edition of the Collected Works De Quincey had been amusing himself with fresh literary projects. Mr. Hogg, after noting it as one of the peculiarities of his conversation that sometimes he would propound the most absurd things, and maintain them so gravely that it was impossible to say whether he was merely quizzing you and himself or might not be really in earnest, applies the remark especially to his persistence in bringing forward certain schemes of publishing adventure. While some of these alarmed Mr. Hogg by threatening interruption to the main labour, there was one which would not have been so chimerical in itself had time been left for it. This was a project of a new History of England in twelve volumes. After he was seventy he still harped on the project to Mr. Hogg, and longed for the conclusion of the Collective Edition, that he might begin the new work. He could finish it, he thought, in four years.

The autumn of 1859 had come, and the thirteenth volume of the Collected Works had been issued, and the fourteenth and last volume was all but ready for the press, when it became evident that De Quincey's work in the world was over. His life had gone to the extreme extent for which it had been wound up, and it was no definite malady, but the mere weakness of old age, that made him take to his bed. His youngest daughter, summoned from Ireland, where she had been on a visit to her sister, found him too feeble to bear removal to Lasswade, and remained with him in Lothian Street. Dr. Warburton Begbie, an Edinburgh physician of the highest celebrity of that day, was called in on the 22d of October. He visited his patient latterly twice a day, finding him sometimes rallying so much as to be able to sit up or recline on a sofa, eager about what was in the day's newspapers, and trying to read them himself, or turning over the leaves of a new book. The perfect tranquillity of the patient, his anxiety not to give trouble, and the clearness with which he discussed the medical treatment of his case and the action of the remedies employed, especially with reference to the effects that might have been left on his constitution by opium, impressed Dr. Begbie greatly. There were, however, times of swooning and sleepy delirium, from which he seemed to awake with surprise. On such occasions his dreams seemed always to be of children. On Sunday, the 4th of December, the approach of death was so manifest that it was thought right to telegraph for Mrs. Craig, the only other of his children then within reach. She arrived in time to be recognised and welcomed; and on the morning of Thursday, the 8th of December, the two daughters standing by the bedside, and the physician with them, De Quincey passed away.

He had been in a doze for some hours; and, as it had been observed that in his waking hours since the beginning of his illness he had reverted much to the incidents of his childhood and talked especially of his father, regretting that he had known so little of him, so in this final doze his mind seemed to be wandering among the same old memories. "My dear, dear mother: then I was greatly mistaken," he was heard to murmur; and his very last act was to throw up his arms and utter, as if with a cry of surprised recognition, "Sister! sister! sister!" The vision seemed to be that of his sister Elizabeth, dead near Manchester seventy years before, and now waiting for him on the banks of the river.

De Quincey, at the time of his death, was seventy-four years and four months old. There were obituary notices in the newspapers, but not nearly so numerous or loud and elaborate as those which came out on the death of Macaulay, at the age of fifty-nine, twenty days later in the same month. Nor can I find that there was any great attendance at De Quincey's funeral. He was buried in the West Church-yard of Edinburgh, beside his wife and two of their children; and on a tablet on a rather ruinous part of one of the walls of that church-yard, at the end of the bustling Princes Street, and close under the Castle Rock, one may read now this epitaph: *Sacred to the Memory of Thomas De Quincey, who was born at Greenhay, near Manchester, August 15th, 1785, and died in Edinburgh, December 8th, 1859, and of Margaret, his wife, who died August 7th, 1837.* The epitaph, it will be observed, preserves the blunder of most of the biographers as to the place of De Quincey's birth. What does it matter, or the pooriness altogether of the monument? Scott, whose monument is the central object of the city, and the finest ever

reared anywhere in the world to a man of letters, was a native of Edinburgh; Wilson, the noble bronze statue of whom attracts the eye in Princes Street, a little to the west of the Scott monument, was an Edinburgh citizen by adoption; De Quincey, through three-fourths of his literary life belonging by accident to Edinburgh, was in no sense an Edinburgh man, and could expect no corresponding posthumous honours. Not one in two thousand of the inhabitants of Edinburgh at this moment knows where he is buried, or that he is buried in Edinburgh at all; and not once in a year does any one of the select hundred who may be aware of the fact and the place think of visiting the humble grave. Again, what does it matter? De Quincey's real constituency consists of all those, anywhere over the English-speaking world, who care for De Quincey's writings.

CHAPTER XI.

DE QUINCEY'S WRITINGS: GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS.

ONE obvious distinction of De Quincey from most of the other chiefs of English literature is, that the writings by which he holds his high rank consist almost entirely of papers contributed to periodicals. Various books which he projected remained projects only; and, with the exception of his *Logic of Political Economy*, now included among his collected works, and his novel called *Klosterheim*, of which there has been no English reprint, all the products of his pen during the forty years of his literary life appeared originally in the pages of magazines or other serials. Just as Shakspeare may be described, in an off-hand manner, as the author of about thirty-seven plays, so may De Quincey be said to have taken his place in our literature as the author of about one hundred and fifty magazine articles.

Another obvious characteristic of De Quincey's writings is their extreme multifariousness. They range over an extraordinary extent of ground, the subjects of which they principally treat being themselves of the most diverse kinds, while their illustrative references and allusions shoot through a perfect wilderness of miscellaneous scholarship. This multifariousness of his matter is, in fact, but a manifestation of that peculiar personal character which chanced in his case to be brought into the business of

literature. "For my own part, without breach of truth or modesty," he says in one place, "I may affirm that my life has been, on the whole, the life of a philosopher: from my birth, I was made an intellectual creature; and intellectual in the highest sense my pursuits and pleasures have been, even from my school-boy days." Again, in another place, he says: "I have passed more of my life in absolute and unmitigated solitude, voluntarily, and for intellectual purposes, than any person of my age whom I have ever either met with, heard of, or read of." A stress, not intended by De Quincey himself, may be laid on the word *intellectual* in these passages. To hardly any one so little as to him could there have been applied in his youth that observation which Goethe applied with such remarkable prescience to Carlyle in the year 1827, when he defined him as "a *moral* force of great importance," and added that, precisely on account of this depth of the *moral* in his constitution, it was impossible to foresee all that he would produce and effect. No one could have said of De Quincey, at any time of his life, that his strength lay in any predominance of the moral element in his nature. On the contrary, though severe enough in some of his criticisms on conduct, and owning a distinct æsthetic preference for whatever is lovely and of good report, he was defective in original moral impetus or vehemence to a degree beyond the average. It is no mere figure from grammar to say that few men have come into the world, or have gone through it, with a more meagre outfit of the imperative mood. It was because he was so weak in this mood that we may call him so specifically, in his own language, "an *intellectual* creature." His main interest in life was that of universal curiosity, sheer inquisitiveness and meditateness about all things whatso-

ever. Hence his early passion for the acquisition of book-knowledge, and the fact that before his twenty-fifth year he had read so much and so variously as to be even then more entitled to the name of *polyhistor* than almost any of his English contemporaries. Add that other store of knowledge which he had acquired by the exercise of a most subtle and insinuating faculty of observation upon human life and character around him, the "*quicquid agunt homines*" in all its varieties of "*votum, timor, ira, voluptas, gaudia, discursus*;" and add, moreover, a preternaturally tenacious memory; and it will be seen with what an unusual stock of materials De Quincey came to the craft of magazine authorship. When he did so, in his thirty-fifth year, it was under the compulsion of circumstances. He would rather not have adopted the craft; he would rather have gone on still as a private student and observer, with the chance of some outcome in laboured book-form at his own leisure; but, once harnessed to the periodical printing-press, he was at no loss for matter. His command of German greatly increased in those days his range into the unhackneyed and uncommon; but, without that help, his extensive readings in the classics, in mediæval Latin, and in our earlier and less-known English authors, would have sufficed, in the grasp of a memory so retentive as his, to impart to his writings much of that polyhistoric character, that multifariousness of out-of-the-way learning, which we discern in them.

It is an important advance to be able to add that De Quincey's writings, so miscellaneous in their collective range, are all, or almost all, of high quality. There are differences among them in this respect; but there is hardly one that does not, in the stereotyped phrase of reviewers, "well repay perusal." Remembering this high general

level of goodness through such a numerous series of articles, and remembering the super-excellent goodness of not a few, admirers of De Quincey are in the habit of saying among themselves, plaintively, "Ah, there is no such writing nowadays!" and have actually put the exclamation into print. This is, in part, only the natural exaggeration of loyalty to an old favourite; and it forgets, in the first place, what a quantity of very bad magazine-writing there was in the days when De Quincey was at his most brilliant in that business, and also what a quantity of excellent writing there is in our magazines and reviews at present. But, in a rough way, the complaint seems to hit a truth. With some exceptions, there does seem to be less of real mental exertion, less of notion that real mental exertion is called for, in the magazine-writing and review-writing of the present time than there was in the palmy old days when De Quincey, Carlyle, Macaulay, and some others were doing their best in our monthlies and quarterlies, and making their living by that species of labour. Anything does—any kind of useful, or, as they are beginning to call it, "informatory," printed matter, or any compost of rough proximate ideas on a subject, or any string of platitudes, repeating what nobody ever did not know, if tinselled sufficiently into pretty sentences. Not unfrequently, when you have read the article of greatest celebrity in the current number of a periodical, you find that there has been no other motive to it than a theftuous hope to amuse an hour for you after dinner by serving up to you again the plums from some book which you and every one else have read three weeks or a month before, the entire drift of the article otherwise, and the whole substance of its connecting paragraphs, not betraying the possession, or at least the ex-

penditure, of one quarter of an ounce of real or original brain. It is experience such as this that makes one, so hastily, a *laudator temporis acti* in periodical literature as in other matters, and drives one back to De Quincey's sixteen volumes or to any similar collection, with such angry forgetfulness of the fact that these collections themselves are but the solid monuments remaining from amid acres of vanished rubbish. The forgetfulness is wrong, but the result for readers may happen to be beneficial. De Quincey's sixteen volumes of magazine articles are full of brain from beginning to end. At the rate of about half a volume a day, they would serve for a month's reading, and a month continuously might be worse expended. There are few courses of reading from which a young man of good natural intelligence would come away more instructed, charmed, and stimulated, or, to express the matter as definitely as possible, with his mind more *stretched*. Good natural intelligence, a certain fineness of fibre, and some amount of scholarly education, have to be presupposed, indeed, in all readers of De Quincey. But, even for the fittest readers, a month's complete and continuous course of De Quincey would be too much. Better have him on the shelf, and take down a volume at intervals for one or two of the articles to which there may be an immediate attraction. An evening with De Quincey in this manner will always be profitable.

Not only was it De Quincey's laudable habit to put brain into all his articles, but it so chanced that the brain he had at his disposal was a brain of no common order. Let us get rid, however of the disagreeable word *brain*, and ask, in more manly and less physiological fashion, what were the chief characteristics of De Quincey's peculiar mind and genius. At the basis of all, as we have

seen, was his learning, his wealth of miscellaneous and accurate knowledge. On that topic enough has been said; and we advert to it again only because it is well to remember that, whatever else De Quincey was, he was at all events a scholar and polyhistor.

But what was he besides? He was distinguished from most modern specimens of the genus *polyhistor* by the possession, in the first place, of a singularly independent, clear, subtle, exact, and penetrating intellect. The independence of his intellect is in itself remarkable. No one was less disposed to take common opinions on trust, no one more keenly sceptical in his general judgments, no one more ready to challenge a popular or even a scholastic tradition on any subject, re-investigate the evidence, and persist in getting at the root of the matter for himself. His strength in this quality has been called love of paradox, and sometimes it does go to that length. As he himself explained, however, a paradox is properly not something incredible, but only something beyond the bounds of present belief; and it is remarkable how often, when he is followed in one of his so-called paradoxes, he turns out to be right. Sometimes, when this happens, one finds that it was the mere exercise of shrewd common-sense, a rapid deductive perception from the first of what *must* be the case in the circumstances, that enabled him to challenge the common opinion; but more frequently it is his historical knowledge that serves him, his power of marshalling facts inductively and interpreting their relations. But, even when he fails to convince, he always instructs, always suggests something that remains in the mind and goes on working—never leaves a question exactly as it was. One is reminded, in reading him, of Goldsmith's saying about Burke's conversation in contrast

with Johnson's. Admiring Johnson's extraordinary powers in that way as much as any man, but irritated by Boswell's perpetual harping on the theme, "Is he like Burke, sir, who winds into a subject like a serpent?" Goldsmith was once moved to ask. Now, this serpentine insinuation of himself into the heart of a subject, rather than Johnson's direct and broadside style of attack upon a subject externally, was De Quincey's usual method. He generally knows his conclusion from the first, and sometimes announces it dogmatically at the outset; but, whether for inquiry towards his conclusion or for proof of it after it has been announced, his habit is to choose a point of entry, and thence, by subtle and intricate windings, to reach the centre, where the concurrent trains will meet, and all will become clear. His windings have often the appearance of wilful digressions, and digressiveness is the fault with which he is most commonly charged. It was, perhaps, the same labyrinthine habit, or at all events the tendency to long-spun threads of reasoning, that Carlyle had in view when he applied the epithet "wire-drawn" to some of De Quincey's mental products. His digressions, however, to use his own phrase, have a wonderful knack of *revolving* to the point whence they set out, and generally with a fresh freight of meaning to be incorporated at that point; and, so far as one might acquiesce in the description of some of De Quincey's mental products as "wire-drawn," it is in cases where one might agree with Carlyle that the kind of matter dealt with was not worth so much manipulation, and that simple assumption or asseveration, or decision by a toss-up, would have saved time and answered all practical purposes. Very rarely, however, will one of De Quincey's subtlest ingenuities be voted useless by any reader who does come qualified with the due

amount of preliminary interest in the kind of matter discussed—so much pleasure is there in observing the ingenuity itself, and so certain is it, as has been already said, that some germ of future thought will be left if the immediate result has been disappointing. Then with what a passion for scientific exactness does De Quincey treat everything, and in what a state of finished clearness at the end he leaves every speculation of his, so far as it may have been carried! His numerical divisions and subdivisions, so unusual in literary papers, are themselves signs of the practised thinker, refusing to part with any of the habits or devices of scientific analysis wherever they will help him. In short, very seldom has there been such a combination of the purely logical intellect with so much of scholarly erudition.

De Quincey's intellect, while keenly analytic and exact, was also very rich and inventive. The distinction will be understood by remembering the essays and disquisitions of Bacon, Sir Thomas Browne, Jeremy Taylor, Burke, or Coleridge, in contrast with those of such thinkers as Locke, Bishop Butler, David Hume, James Mill, or Sir William Hamilton. That the distinction does not coincide with that into the two opposed philosophical schools will have appeared from the mixture of names. Neither does it connect itself with any distinction of emotional temperaments among thinkers, as into the cool and the fervid. There may be a fervid thinker whose manner of thinking is of the plain and straightforward sort; and there may be a cool thinker whose manner of thinking, while equally scientific and precise, is at the same time rich and inventive. Nor does Bacon's distinction between *lumen siccum*, or dry light, and *lumen humidum*, or light drenched in the affections and customs, correspond exactly with what is meant; nor does the ordinary distinction between the non-

poetic and the poetic, though that comes nearer. The distinction is purely one of intellectual manner, and may be seen where there is identity in the substance of the thought to be expressed. Some writers, knowing what they mean to say beforehand, say it nakedly and rigidly, with nothing additional or subsidiary; others, meaning the same thing, and equally knowing what they mean beforehand, cannot put it forth without putting forth also a good deal more that has been generated in the very act of thinking it out, and that, while organically related to it, may be independently interesting. De Quincey belongs, in the main, to the latter class. As he had a teeming memory, so he had, as he tells us himself, "an electric aptitude for seizing analogies," or, as he again expresses it more fully, "a logical instinct for feeling in a moment the secret analogies or parallelisms that connect things else apparently remote." Hence that quality of his thought which we have called richness or inventiveness. In the act of thinking anything, metonymies, metaphors, anecdotes, illustrations historical or fantastic, start up in his mind, become incorporate with his primary thought, and are, in fact, its language. It will not do to call this, as some have proposed, the literary mode of treating a subject, and to call the bleaker mode the strictly scientific; for the former may be as strictly scientific, as valid and effective logically, as the latter. It would not be difficult, at all events, were a specimen passage of exposition or reasoning produced from a modern English writer of the more arid and rigid order, to produce from De Quincey, if the same topic should be really within his province and he should chance to have treated it, a parallel passage in *his* richer style beating his rigid brother's out of sight for logical precision and clearness, perfection of impression on the pure understanding. Nev-

ertheless, as it is the richer and more inventive style of writing that succeeds best in producing what, while serving the purposes of philosophical or scientific exposition, will take rank also distinctively as a piece of *literature*, there is no harm in saying that De Quincey's intellect was in the main of the literary order. In most of his papers it is professedly as a man of letters, remembering the aims and objects of literature proper, and seeking to touch the general human heart, that he handles philosophical or other speculative problems. Hence those egotisms, those frequent Montaigne-like confidences between himself and his readers as he proceeds, which, as part of his passion for introducing whatever of general human interest can be made relative to a subject or can brighten and illustrate it, give to his most abstract dissertations such a character of individuality or De Quinceyism. There are cases, his greatest admirers must admit, in which the subsidiary swallows up the primary, and the captain's luggage all but sinks the ship and cargo. For example, it is rather provoking to a short temper, in a paper on Sir William Hamilton and his Philosophy, to find the exordium consisting of a long complaint about the postal difficulties between Lasswade and Edinburgh, and the same subject and others equally irrelevant recurring *ad libitum* throughout, while poor Sir William is kept waiting in a corner and is fetched out of it only at intervals. The only excuse in such cases is, that De Quincey seems to have understood it to be bargained between himself and his readers that, whatever title he gave to a paper, he was to be the sole judge of what it should turn out to be, provided the sum total should be sufficiently amusing. Very rarely, however, is any such excuse needed. While it does seem to have been a canon with De Quincey, in the preparation of his articles, that the

sum total of each should be interesting by some means or other, and while very often an article is not quite what would have been expected from the title, it is astonishing how habitually, in the hurry of magazine-writing, he contrived to redeem and justify his title, keep his real subject in hand through all seeming involutions and digressions, return with artistic fidelity to the key-note, and leave all at the end, as we have said, in a state of finished clearness.

There was in De Quincey's genius, as all know, a very considerable vein of humour. A sense of fun follows him into his most serious disquisitions, and reveals itself in freaks of playfulness and jets of comic fancy; and once or twice, as in his *Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts*, he breaks into sheer extravagance or wild and protracted rollick. Even then it cannot be said that his humour is of the largest-hearted kind, so dependent is it on deliberate irony, a Petronian jostling of the ghastly with the familiar, or the express simulation of lunacy. In its display on the smaller scale, as diffused through his writings, it is generally good-natured and kindly. It is not to be denied, however, that there was an ingredient of the mischievous or Mephistophelic in De Quincey's temper, which could show itself occasionally under the guise of his usually gentle humour. He could never have been "a good hater," his equipment of moral energy being too languid for that; but there are parts and passages of his writings that leave the impression of a something which it would be difficult to distinguish from spite and malevolence.

Humour and pathos, we have been told, are twins, and inseparable. However that may be, De Quincey's endowment in pathos was certainly not less than his endowment in humour. From his earliest infancy, as we saw, a sense of the manifold miseries of life had been impressed upon

him by his own experience and observation, and had settled in him into a kind of brooding melancholy. Not only such common calamities as bereavement, disease, physical pain, poverty, oppression, misconstruction, contempt, but the rarer and more secret forms of anguish that belong to peculiar temperaments and fatal shocks of circumstance, had been meditated by him, with the diligence of a constitutional bias to that sombre field of study, and with continued aids from his own troubles, till he had become a master in the whole science of sorrow. In particular, that early discovery which had first made the word *Pariah* so significant to him—the discovery of the omnipresence of inherited and unregarded misery, in specks or in masses, on the skirts of smiling society, or actually within its bosom—had accompanied him all his life long, till the word *Pariah* had become, as we noted, one of the most indispensable words in his vocabulary, and the corresponding notion one of his forms of thought. In his personal behaviour, feeble as it was practically, this recollection of the miserable and dismal on all sides of him, this incessant wandering of his thoughts to the slave, the pauper, the lazar, the criminal, the street outcast, and the maniac, had shown itself in a kind of constant anti-Pharisaism, a constant self-humiliation and pity for the abject. Why should he abhor, why should he condemn, why should he stand aloof, why should he refuse alms, or institute very rigid inquiries before giving: what was he himself that he should be punctilious? This mood, and the theme which occasioned it, he carried into his writings. There, too, one finds an habitual recollection of the variety and immensity of suffering diffused through life; and there, too, the inclination of the teaching, in the matter of the ways and means of dealing with crime and misery, is always to

wards what is commonly called "the sentimental," but some would call "the Christian." Hence also, in part, the frequent tendency to the lyrical and plaintive in the cast of De Quincey's language.

There was yet a grander source of this tendency to the lyrical in his feeling for the mysterious and sublime. It was a saying of his own that he could not live without mystery. No man that is worth much can. If all humanity could be rolled into one soul, to think and feel as such, then all those activities and necessities having been abolished which arise from the very fact that it is distributed or disparate, into what mood could it settle and be absorbed but that of wondering speculation into its own origin? On this very account, is not this mood, which may be called the metaphysical mood, the most essentially and specifically *human* of all moods? Most people have no time for it; they have too much to do; but he is hardly a man who does not fall into it sometimes; and it is nursed in some into abnormal intensity by constitutional aptitude and by habits of solitude. De Quincey was one of these. He was wrapt in a general religious wonder; he went through the world, one may say, in a fit of metaphysical musing. But not only was he occupied, as all such minds are, with the great objects of religious contemplation in its most abstract reaches towards the invisible, and with the standing metaphysical problems connected with those objects; his sense of mystery fastened also on all those elementary sublimities in nature or life which, by their pre-eminent power over the human imagination, seem like the chief irruptions of the invisible and supernatural into the sphere of man. The thunder and the lightning, the sun in the heavens, the nocturnal sky, the quiet vastness of a mountain-range, the roar of the unresting ocean,

the carnage of a great battle-field, the stealthy ravage of a pestilence, the tramp of a multitude in insurrection, a Joan of Arc heroic and death-defying before her judges, Cæsar at the Rubicon when the world hung on his decision and there came upon him the phrenzy to cross—such were the physical grandeurs, and such the facts and moments of historic majesty, with which De Quincey's mind delighted to commune, as if seeing in them the clearest messages from infinitude and the most startling intimations of the intermingling of the demoniacal with the divine. Yet another descent, however, and we find his passion for mystery taking relief even in the wizardly and necromantic. Among the passages of his early reading which had struck him with an effect so extraordinary that he could account for it only by supposing that they had wakened special affinities in his constitution, he mentions particularly the opening scene in *Macbeth* :

"*A Desert Place. Thunder and Lightning. Enter three Witches.*

"*First Witch.* When shall we three meet again,
In thunder, lightning, or in rain?

"*Second Witch.* When the hurly-burly's done,
When the battle's lost and won.

"*Third Witch.* That will be ere the set of sun."

It would be difficult for any one not to carry away something of the feeling of this passage, and hundreds of thousands have done so; but what we observe in De Quincey is, that he carried away the feeling and retained it in that form of a permanent tenet which it seems to have held in Shakspeare's own creed: viz., in the form of a postulate for the imagination, if not for the reason, of the interference in human affairs of other and more occult agencies than are dreamt of in the ordinary philosophy. No one, indeed, could be more humorously pungent on all super-

stitutions of the witchcraft order than De Quincey was. He took special pleasure in showing how, by the application of mathematics and physical tests, the most pretentious of those superstitions, such as astrology, could be blasted into nonsense. But this does not prevent our detecting in him a lurking fondness for some personal variety of the doctrine of a possible interfusion of the non-human or quondam-human with the known life of the present. Perhaps the best name for this variety of the affection for the mysterious in De Quincey's mind is Druidism, or the Druidic element. It is a more common element in British genius, and perhaps a more respectable, than is generally supposed. It reveals itself in De Quincey in his fondness for noting dreams, omens, casual symbolisms, marvellous coincidences, anticipations or prophecies of death, and the like, and also in his liking for such subjects of historical investigation as secret societies—Freemasonry, Rosicrucianism, and the Pagan Oracles.

To be noted, finally, in this enumeration of De Quincey's characteristics, is the prominence in his genius of the special faculty of poetic imagination. Though involved partly in what has just been said as to the strength of his feeling for the mysterious and sublime, and also in what was formerly said as to the richness and inventiveness of his manner of thinking on any subject, this remark is really independent. The feeling for the mysterious and sublime is a natural cause of poetic conception, and a habit of poetic conception will contribute, with other things, to richness or literary charm in the treatment of a subject; but the poetic faculty, in its distinct and special form, is the faculty of continuous constructive dreaming, of "bodying forth the forms of things unknown," of turning meanings and feelings into actual

"shapes," i. e., into visual and representative phantasies. In what large measure De Quincey possessed this faculty, and how conscious he was that the specimens of it he had left might be one of his distinctions among English prose writers, are as generally known as the fact of his opium-eating, and are, indeed, often connected with that fact in recollections of him.

In an essay on "The Genius of De Quincey" Mr. Shadworth Hodgson, who knew him personally, vouches that no description of him could surpass for exactness that provided beforehand by the poet Thomson in the stanza of his *Castle of Indolence* in which he introduces the bard Philomelus:

"He came, the bard, a little Druid wight
Of withered aspect; but his eye was keen,
With sweetness mixed. In russet brown bedight,
As is his sister of the copses green,
He crept along, unpromising of mien.
Gross he who judges so! His soul was fair,
Bright as the children of yon azure sheen.
True comeliness, which nothing can impair,
Dwells in the mind: all else is vanity and glare."

The quotation is a happy one, and entitles Mr. Hodgson to our thanks. By this time, however, we ought to know our little Druid wight somewhat more intimately than by his external appearance. It remains only to say something about his English style.

In no case is there better proof or illustration than in De Quincey's of the important principle of the radical identity of style and thought, the impossibility of separating them in ultimate theory, and the mischief of the common habit of conceiving otherwise. In writing or speaking, it is not as if you first obtained your thought,

and then looked about for a mantle in which to dress it, and might choose the mantle coarse or fine, loose or tight, green or purple. The mantle itself, every fibre of it, is a fabrication of thinkings and feelings, coming into existence by the very action and motion of that main thought or feeling which you call the core or substance, and organically united with it, and partaking of all its qualities. To change your style is to change your mode of thinking; nay, to change the kind of matter that you will allow to come into your mind. All those characteristics of De Quincey's mind that have been enumerated reproduce themselves, therefore, as characteristics of his style, and may be observed and studied afresh under that name. Hence, too, an excellency in him that ought to be found in every writer who ranges over any considerable variety of subjects—to wit, a versatility of style, a change in the character of the wording and the syntax, from the simple and plain to the richer and more involved, answering to every change in the matter, mood, or purpose. To write always in an easy conversational style means never to allow anything to come into the mind that could not be generated in the course of easy conversation with a friend or two—which, as friends now go, would be hard news for philosophy, poetry, and a few other things that are considered not unimportant; to try to write always like Goldsmith or Charles Lamb means to beg to have your mind taken back and re-melted into the precise mould of Goldsmith's or Charles Lamb's—which might be an exchange in your favour, but is impossible; to write always in good old Saxon English and eschew Latin and Greek words means to abstain from traffic with all objects and notions that have come into the cognisance of the English intellect since the time of King Harold, or else to make



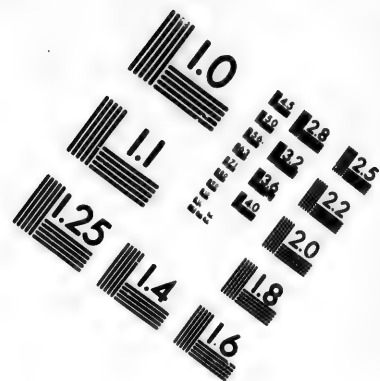
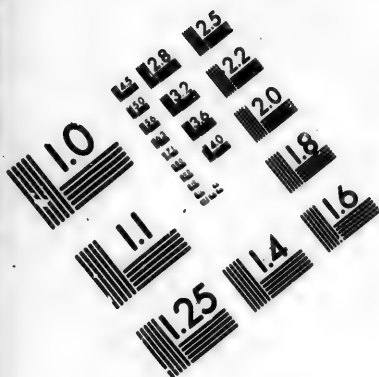
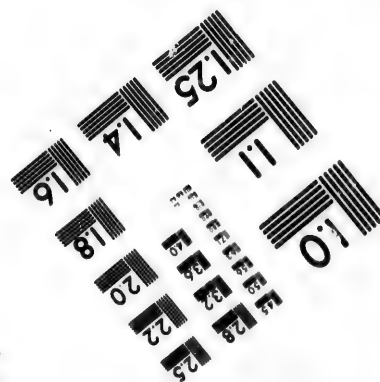
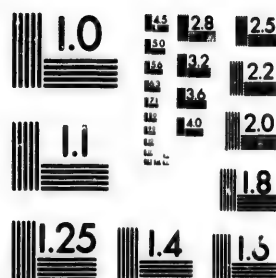


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yourself a scarecrow and laughing-stock, and forswear some of the noblest glories of your composite nationality, by rigging yourself up in imagined equivalents from the vocabulary of Cedric and Gurth the swineherd. All the same, while there ought to be this expectation of variety in the style of a writer, according to his subject and purpose, it remains true that every writer has, on the whole, a style of his own. He is discernible from others by his style, just as, and just because, he is discernible from others by the total contour of that combination of mental qualities which is called his genius. Like most other traditional and time-honoured distinctions, the distinction between thought and style is practically valuable; it is, indeed, indispensable in criticism; but the reason is, that the study of a writer's style is, in fact, one way, and the most obvious way, of becoming minutely acquainted with his mental resources and processes. Style is mental behaviour from moment to moment; and, if it involves such a thing as a self-imposed rule or rhythm, then that rule or rhythm is itself a function of the mind that imposes it, contents included as well as habits.

The style of De Quincey, as might be expected, is pre-vaillingly intellectual. There is nothing tempestuous in it; we are not hurried along by any excess of rage or other animating passion. Even when his pathos or his feeling of the mysterious and sublime is at its highest, and the strain accordingly becomes most lyrical, we are aware of the presence of a keen intellectual perceptiveness, an artistic self-possession, a power of choosing and reasoning among different means towards a desired effect. It is a beautiful style, uniquely De Quincey's, the characteristic of which, in its more level and easy specimens, is intellectual nimbleness, a light precision and softness of

spring, while in the higher specimens, where the movement becomes more involved and intricately rhythmical, there is still the same sense of a leisurely intellectual instinct, rather than glow and rapture, as regulating the feat. If one could fancy such a thing as a flow of ivy or other foliage, rich, soft, and glancing, but not too dense, advancing quietly over a surface and covering it equably, but with a power of shooting itself rapidly to selected points and pinnacles, *that* might be an image of De Quincey's language overspreading a subject. It moves quietly, enfolding all it meets with easy grace, and leaving a vesture pleasantly soft and fine, rather than gaudily-varied or obtrusive; but it can collect itself into rings of overgrowth, or shoot into devices and festoons. Very often, when the subject is simple, when it is an ordinary piece of description or explanation that is on hand, the phrasing is familiar and colloquial, with short and simple sentences to correspond, though even then with a scholarly tact for neatness and accuracy, a quest of liveliness and elegance, and a wonderful power of alighting on the exact word that is fittest. The tendency of De Quincey, however, as all know, is to subjects of a recondite order, and to the recondite in all subjects; and hence what is usually remembered as De Quincey's style is that style of more stately complexity, with long evolutions and harmonies of sentence, and free resort to all the wealth of the Latin element in our tongue, of which his more elaborate writings are examples. On this subject of the "elaborate" style a quotation from himself, reflecting on the style of Hazlitt and Charles Lamb, may be relevant:

"Hazlitt was not eloquent, because he was discontinuous. No man can be eloquent whose thoughts are abrupt, insulated, capricious, and (to borrow an impressive word from Coleridge) non-sequacious.

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Eloquence resides not in separate or fractional ideas, but in the relations of manifold ideas, and in the mode of their evolution from each other. It is not, indeed, enough that the ideas should be many, and their relations coherent; the main condition lies in the *key* of the evolution, in the *law* of the succession. The elements are nothing without the atmosphere that moulds, and the dynamic forces that combine. Now, Hazlitt's brilliancy is seen chiefly in separate splinterings of phrase or image, which throw upon the eye a vitreous scintillation for a moment, but spread no deep suffusions of colour, and distribute no masses of mighty shadow. A flash, a solitary flash, and all is gone. . . . Hazlitt's thoughts were of the same fractured and discontinuous order as his illustrative images—seldom or never self-diffusive; and *that* is a sufficient argument that he had never cultivated philosophic thinking. . . . We are bound to acknowledge that Lamb thought otherwise on this point, manifesting what seemed to us an extravagant admiration of Hazlitt, and perhaps even in part for that very glitter which we are denouncing; at least he did so in conversation with ourselves. But, on the other hand, as this conversation travelled a little into the tone of a disputation, and *our* frost on this point might seem to justify some undue fervour by way of balance, it is very possible that Lamb did not speak his absolute and dispassionate judgment. And yet again, if he *did*, may we, with all reverence for Lamb's exquisite genius, have permission to say that his own intellect sinned by this very habit of discontinuity? . . . He himself, we fear, not bribed by indulgent feelings to another, not moved by friendship, but by native tendency, shrank from the continuous, from the sustained, from the elaborate. The elaborate, indeed, without which much truth and beauty must perish in germ, was by name the object of his invectives. The instances are many, in his own beautiful essays, where he literally collapses, literally sinks away from openings suddenly offering themselves to flights of pathos or solemnity in direct prosecution of his own theme. On any such summons, where an ascending impulse and an untired pinion were required, he *refuses* himself (to use military language) invariably. The least observing reader of *Elia* cannot have failed to notice that his most felicitous passages always accomplish their circuit in a few sentences. The gyration within which his sentiment wheels, no matter of what kind it may be, is always the shortest possible. It does not prolong itself, it does not repeat itself, it does not propagate

itself. . . . We ourselves, occupying the very station of polar opposition to that of Lamb, being as morbidly, perhaps, in the one excess as he in the other, naturally detected this omission in Lamb's nature at an early stage of our acquaintance. Not the famed Regulus, with his eyelids torn away, and his uncurtained eyeballs exposed to the noontide glare of a Carthaginian sun, could have shrieked with more anguish of recoil from torture than we from certain sentences and periods in which Lamb perceived no fault at all. *Pomp*, in our apprehension, was an idea of two categories; the *pompous* might be spurious, but it might also be genuine. It is well to love the simple—we love it; nor is there any opposition at all between *that* and the very glory of pomp. But, as we once put the case to Lamb, if, as a musician, as the leader of a mighty orchestra, you had this theme offered to you, 'Belshazzar the king gave a great feast to a thousand of his lords,' or this, 'And on a certain day Marcus Cicero stood up, and in a set speech rendered thanks to Caius Cæsar for Quintus Ligarius pardoned and Marcus Marcellus restored,' surely no man would deny that in such a case simplicity, though in a passive sense not lawfully absent, must stand aside as totally insufficient for the *positive* part."

A great deal of De Quincey's best and most characteristic writing is in the stately and elaborate style here described, the style of sustained splendour, of prolonged wheeling and soaring, as distinct from the style of crackle and brief glitter, of chirp and short flight. This is precisely on account of the exalted and intricate nature of his meaning and feeling in those cases; and, if some readers there fall off from him or dislike him, it is because they themselves are deficient in wing and sinew. For those who do adhere to him and follow him in his passages of more involved and sustained eloquence there are few greater pleasures possible in modern English prose. However magnificent the wording, there is always such an exact fit between it and the amount and shape of the under-fluctuating thought, that suspicion of inflation or bombast anywhere never occurs to one. The same presence everywhere of a vigilant

intellect appears in the perfect logical articulation of sentence with sentence and of clause with clause; while the taste of the technical artist appears equally in the study of minute optical coherence in the imagery and in the fastidious care for fine sound. In this last quality of style—to which, in its lowest degree, Bentham gave the name of *pronunciability*, insisting most strenuously on its importance in all writing—De Quincey is a master. Such was the delicacy of his ear, however, that mere *pronunciability* was not enough for him, and *musical beauty* had to be superadded. Once, writing of Father Newman, and having described him as “originally the ablest son of Puseyism, but now a powerful architect of religious philosophy on his own account,” he interrupts himself to explain that he might have ended the sentence more briefly by substituting for the last nine words the single phrase “master-builder,” but that his ear could not endure “a sentence ending with two consecutive trochees, and each of those trochees ending with the same syllable *er*.” He adds, “Ah, reader! I would the gods had made thee rhythmical, that thou mightest comprehend the thousandth part of my labours in the evasion of cacophony.” The last phrase, “the evasion of cacophony,” is an instance of another of De Quincey’s verbal habits in his more elaborate writing—his deliberate choice now and then of an unusually learned combination of Latin or Greek or other polysyllabic words. Often, as in the present instance, it is a whim of mere humour or self-irony. Often, however, it is from a desire to be exact to his meaning and to leave that meaning indissolubly associated with the word or phrase that does most closely express it. Occasionally, as when he speaks of “the crepuscular antelucan worship” of the Essenes, or of a sentence as being liable to “a whole

nosology of malconformations," or of the importance attached to the mystery of baptism among our forefathers as "shown by the multiplied *ricochets* through which it impressed itself upon their vocabulary," it will depend on the temper and the intellectual alertness of the reader at the moment whether the phrase is accepted or voted needlessly quaint and abstruse; but most of his Latinisms or other neologisms do recommend themselves as at once luminous and tasteful, and it is hardly to them that exception is taken by his most severe critics. They object rather to certain faults to which he is liable in those portions of his writings where he affects the brisk and popular. By a kind of reaction from his other extreme of stateliness, he is then apt to be too familiar and colloquial, and to help himself to slang and kitchen-rhetoric. He will speak of a thing as "smashed"—which is too violent for the nerves of those who cannot bear to see a thing "smashed," but prefer that it should be "broken in pieces" or "reduced to fragments;" he will interject such an exclamation as "O crimini!"—which is unpardonable in sedate society; he will take the Jewish historian Josephus by the button, address him as "Joe" through a whole article, and give him a black eye into the bargain—which is positively profane. In most such cases one does not see why De Quincey should not have the same liberty as Swift or Thackeray; but it must be admitted that sometimes the joke is feeble and the slang unpleasant. In excuse one has to remember that a magazine-writer is often driven to shifts. And, slips of taste in the vocabulary discounted, how many magazine-writers will compete with De Quincey in the accuracy, the disciplined accuracy, of his grammar? His pointing in itself is a testimony to the logical clearness of his intellect; and I have found no single recurring fault

of syntax in his style, unless it be in his sanction of a very questionable use of the English participle. "No Christian state could be much in advance of another, *supposing* that Popery opposed no barriers to free communication," is an example of a frequent construction with De Quincey, which I wish he had avoided. As he has not, the benefit of his authority may be claimed for that apparent slovenliness of an unrelated or misrelated participle which, by some fiction of an elliptical case-absolute, or of transmutation of the participial form into a conjunction or adverb, passes as consistent with the free genius of our uninflected language. But it jars on a classic sense of grammar, and is wholly unnecessary.¹

¹ For a minute and instructive study of the mechanism of De Quincey's style, I may refer to Professor Minto's *Manual of English Prose Literature*.

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CHAPTER XII.

DE QUINCEY'S WRITINGS: CLASSIFICATION AND REVIEW.

How are De Quincey's writings to be classified? His own classification, propounded in the General Preface to the edition of his Collected Works, was to the effect that they might be distributed roughly into three sorts—*first*, those papers of fact and reminiscence the object of which was primarily to amuse the reader, though they might reach to a higher interest, *e. g.*, the *Autobiographic Sketches*; *secondly*, essays proper, or papers addressing themselves purely or primarily to "the understanding as an insulated faculty," *e. g.*, *The Essenes*, *The Cæsars*, and *Cicero*; and, *thirdly*, that "far higher class of compositions" which might be considered as examples of a very rare kind of "impassioned prose," *e. g.*, large portions of *The Confessions of an Opium-eater* and the supplementary *Suspiria de Profundis*. This classification, though not quite the same as Bacon's division of the "parts of learning" (by which he meant "kinds of literature") into History, or the Literature of Memory; Philosophy, or the Literature of Reason; and Poetry, or the Literature of Imagination, is practically equivalent. Hence, as Bacon's classification is the more scientific and searching, and also the most familiar and popular, we shall be pretty safe in adopting it, and dividing De Quincey's writings into: (I.) Writings of Reminiscence, or Descriptive, Biographical, and Historical

Writings; (II.) Speculative, Didactic, and Critical Writings; (III.) Imaginative Writings and Prose-Poetry. It is necessary, above all things, to premise that in De Quincey the three sorts of writing shade continually into each other. Where this difficulty of the constant blending of kinds in one and the same paper is not met by the obvious preponderance of one of the kinds, it may be obviated by naming some papers in more divisions than one. With that understanding, we proceed to a classified synopsis of De Quincey's literary remains:

I. DESCRIPTIVE, BIOGRAPHICAL, AND HISTORICAL.

The writings of this class may be enumerated and subdivided as follows:

I. AUTOBIOGRAPHIC:—Specially of this kind are *The Confessions of an English Opium-eater* and the *Autobiographic Sketches*; but autobiographic matter is dispersed through other papers.

II. BIOGRAPHIC SKETCHES OF PERSONS KNOWN TO THE AUTHOR:—Some such are included in the autobiographic writings; but distinct papers of the kind are *Recollections of the Lake Poets, or Sketches of Coleridge, Wordsworth, and Southey*, and the articles entitled *Coleridge and Opium-eating, Charles Lamb, Professor Wilson, Sir William Hamilton, Walking Stewart, Note on Hazlitt, and Dr. Parr, or Whiggism in its Relations to Literature*. All these papers are partly critical. Several papers of the same sort that appeared in magazines have not been reprinted in the Collective British Edition.

III. OTHER BIOGRAPHIC SKETCHES:—*Shakspeare* (in Vol. XV.), *Milton* (in Vol. X.), *Pope* (in Vol. XV.), *Richard Bentley, Percy Bysshe Shelley, The Marquis Wellesley, Last Days of Immanuel Kant* (a digest from the German), *Lessing, Herder, Goethe* (in Vol. XV.), *Schiller*. These also include criticism with biography.

IV. HISTORICAL SKETCHES AND DESCRIPTIONS:—*Homer and the Homericæ, Philosophy of Herodotus, Toilette of the Hebrew Lady* (archæological), *The Cæsars* (in six chapters, forming the greater part of Vol. IX.), *Charlemagne, Revolt of the Tartars, The Revolution of Greece, Modern Greece, Ceylon, China* (a little essay on the Chinese charac-

ter, with illustrations), *Modern Superstition, Anecdote, French and English Manners, Account of the Williams Murders* (the postscript to "Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts"). In the same subclass we would include the two important papers entitled *Rhetoric and Style*; for, though to a considerable extent critical and didactic, they are, despite their titles, chiefly surveys of Literary History.

V. HISTORICAL SPECULATIONS AND RESEARCHES :—In this class may be included *Cicero, The Casuistry of Roman Meals, Greece under the Romans, Judas Iscariot, The Essenes, The Pagan Oracles, Secret Societies, Historico-critical Inquiry into the Origin of the Rosicrucians and Freemasons, Ælius Lamia.*

The two Autobiographic volumes, and the volume of *Reminiscences of Coleridge, Wordsworth, and Southey*, are among the best known of De Quincey's writings. Among the other biographic sketches of persons known to him, *Charles Lamb, Walking Stewart, and Dr. Parr* are those of the highest merit—the last very severe and satirical, but full of interest and of marked ability. Of the other biographic sketches the ablest and most interesting by far is *Richard Bentley*, a really splendid specimen of biography in miniature. The *Encyclopædia* article on *Shakspeare*, though somewhat thin, deserves notice for the perfection of its proportions as a summary of what is essential in our information respecting Shakspeare's life. It is not yet superannuated. The similar article on *Pope* is interesting as an expression of De Quincey's generous admiration all in all of a poet whom he treats very severely in detail in some of his critical papers; and it is rare to meet so neat and workman-like a little curiosity as the paper on *The Marquis Wellesley*. Of the personal sketches of eminent Germans, that entitled *The Last Days of Immanuel Kant*, though it is only a translated digest from a German original, bears the palm for delicious richness of anecdote and vividness of portraiture. De Quincey's

credit in it, except in so far as he shaped and changed and infused life while translating (which was a practice of his), rests on the fact that he was drawn to the subject by his powerful interest in Kant's philosophy, and conceived the happy idea of such a mode of creating among his countrymen a personal affection for the great abstract thinker. Some of the other German sketches, especially *Lessing* and *Herder*, have the same special merit of being early and useful attempts to introduce some knowledge of German thought and literature into England; but the *Goethe*, on all accounts, is discreditable. It exhibits De Quincey at about his very worst; for, though raising the estimate of Goethe's genius that had been announced in the earlier critical paper on his "*Wilhelm Meister*," it retains something of the malice of that paper.

When we pass to the papers of historical description it is hardly a surprise to find that it is De Quincey's tendency in such papers to run to disputed or momentous "points" and concentrate the attention on those. A magazine paper did not afford breadth of canvas enough for complete historical representation under such titles as he generally chose. No exception of the kind, indeed, can be taken to his *Revolt of the Tartars*, which is a noble effort of historical painting, done with a sweep and breadth of poetic imagination entitling it, though a history, to rank also among his prose-phantasies. Nor does the remark apply to the *Account of the Williams Murders*, which beats for ghastly power anything else known in Newgate Calendar literature. But the tendency to "points" is shown in most of the other papers in the same sub-class. Among these *The Philosophy of Herodotus* may be mentioned for its singularly fine appreciation of the Grecian father of history, and *Modern Greece* for its amusing and humorous

instructiveness. *Rhetoric* and *Style* are among De Quincey's greatest performances; and, though in them too, considered as sketches of Literary History, the strength runs towards points and specialities, the titles declare that beforehand and indicate what the specialities are. *The Cæsars* is, undoubtedly, his most ambitious attempt, all in all, in the historical department; and he set great store by it himself; but it cannot, I think, take rank among his highest productions. There are striking passages and suggestions in it; but the general effect is too hazy, many of the parts are hurried, and none of the characters of the Emperors stands out with convincing distinctness after that of Julius Cæsar.

Few authors are so difficult to represent by mere extracts as De Quincey, so seldom does he complete a matter within a short space. The following, however, may pass as specimens of him in the descriptive and historical department. The second is excellent and memorable:

"FIRST SIGHT OF DR. PARR.

"Nobody announced him; and we were left to collect his name from his dress and his conversation. Hence it happened that for some time I was disposed to question with myself whether this might not be Mr. Bobus even (little as it could be supposed to resemble *him*), rather than Dr. Parr, so much did he contradict all my rational preconceptions. 'A man,' said I, 'who has insulted people so outrageously ought not to have done this in single reliance upon his professional protections: a brave man, and a man of honour, would here have carried about with him, in his manner and deportment, some such language as this: "Do not think that I shelter myself under my gown from the natural consequences of the affronts I offer: mortal combats I am forbidden, sir, as a Christian minister, to engage in; but, as I find it impossible to refrain from occasional licence of tongue, I am very willing to fight a few rounds in a ring with any gentleman who fancies himself ill-used."' Let me not be misunder-

stood; I do not contend that Dr. Parr should often, or regularly, have offered this species of satisfaction. But I *do* insist upon it—that no man should have given the very highest sort of provocation so wantonly as Dr. Parr is recorded to have done, unless conscious that, in a last extremity, he was ready, like a brave man, to undertake a short turn-up, in a private room, with any person whatsoever whom he had insulted past endurance. A doctor who had so often tempted (which is a kind way of saying had *merited*) a cudgelling ought himself to have had some ability to cudgel. Dr. Johnson assuredly would have acted on that principle. Had volume the second of that same folio with which he floored Osburn happened to lie ready to the prostrate man's grasp, nobody can suppose that Johnson would have disputed Osburn's right to retaliate; in which case a regular succession of rounds would have been established. Considerations such as these, and Dr. Parr's undeniable reputation (granted even by his most admiring biographers) as a sanguinary flagellator through his long career of pedagogue, had prepared me—nay, entitled me—to expect in Dr. Parr a huge carcase of a man, fourteen stone at the least. Hence, then, my surprise, and the perplexity I have recorded, when the door opened, and a little man, in a most plebeian wig, . . . cut his way through the company, and made for a *fauteuil* standing opposite the fire. Into this he *lunged*; and then forthwith, without preface or apology, began to open his talk upon the room. Here arose a new marvel, and a greater. If I had been scandalized at Dr. Parr's want of thews and bulk, conditions so indispensable for enacting the part of Sam Johnson, much more, and with better reason, was I now petrified with his voice, utterance, gestures, demeanour. Conceive, reader, by way of counterpoise to the fine classical pronunciation of Dr. Johnson, an infantine lisp—the worst I ever heard—from the lips of a man above sixty, and accompanied with all sorts of ridiculous grimaces and little stage gesticulations. As he sat in his chair, turning alternately to the right and to the left, that he might distribute his edification in equal proportions amongst us, he seemed the very image of a little French gossiping abbé. Yet all I have mentioned was, and seemed to be, a trifle by comparison with the infinite pettiness of his matter. Nothing did he utter but little shreds of calumnious tattle, the most ineffably silly and frivolous of all that was then circulating in the Whig *salons* of London against the Regent. . . . He began precisely in these words: 'Oh! I shall tell

you' (laying a stress upon the word *shall*, which still further aided the resemblance to a Frenchman) 'a sto-hee' (lispingly for story) 'about the Pince Wegent' (such was his nearest approximation to *Prince Regent*). 'Oh, the Pince Wegent! the Pince Wegent! what a sad Pince Wegent!' And so the old babbler went on, sometimes wringing his hands in lamentation, sometimes flourishing them with French grimaces and shrugs of shoulders, sometimes expanding and contracting his fingers like a fan. After an hour's twaddle of this scandalous description, suddenly he rose, and hopped out of the room, exclaiming all the way, '*Oh, what a Pince! Oh, what a Wegent! Is it a Wegent, is it a Pince, that you call this man? Oh, what a sad Pince! Did anybody ever hear of such a sad Pince?—such a sad Wegent—such a sad, sad Pince Wegent? Oh, what a Pince! &c., da capo.* Not without indignation did I exclaim to myself, on this winding up of the scene, 'And so this, then, this lithping slandermonger, and retailer of gossip fit rather for washer-women over their tea than for scholars and statesmen, is the champion whom his party would propound as the adequate antagonist of Samuel Johnson! Faugh! . . . Such was my first interview with Dr. Parr; such its issue. And now let me explain my drift in thus detailing its circumstances. Some people will say the drift was doubtless to exhibit Dr. Parr in a disadvantageous light—as a petty gossip and a man of mean personal appearance. No, by no means. Far from it. I, that write this paper, have myself a mean personal appearance; and I love men of mean appearance. . . . Dr. Parr, therefore, lost nothing in *my* esteem by showing a meanish exterior. Yet even this was worth mentioning, and had a value in reference to my present purpose. I like Dr. Parr; I may say even that I *love* him, for some noble qualities of heart that really did belong to him, and were continually breaking out in the midst of his singular infirmities. But this, or a far nobler moral character than Dr. Parr's, can offer no excuse for giving a false elevation to his intellectual pretensions, and raising him to a level which he will be found incapable of keeping when the props of partial friendship are withdrawn.'—*Works*, V. 36–43.

"SUMMARY VIEW OF THE HISTORY OF GREEK LITERATURE.

"There were two groups or clusters of Grecian wits, two deposits or stratifications of the national genius; and these were about a century apart. What makes them specially rememberable is the fac-

that each of these brilliant clusters had gathered separately about that man as their central pivot who, even apart from this relation to the literature, was otherwise the leading spirit of his age. . . . Who were they? The one was PERICLES, the other was ALEXANDER OF MACEDON. Except Themistocles, who may be ranked as senior to Pericles by one generation (or thirty-three years), in the whole deduction of Grecian annals no other public man, statesman, captain-general, administrator of the national resources, can be mentioned as approaching to these two men in splendour of reputation, or even in real merit. Pisistratus was too far back; Alcibiades, who might (chronologically speaking) have been the son of Pericles, was too unsteady and (according to Mr. Coleridge's coinage) 'unreliable,' or perhaps, in more correct English, too '*unrelyuponable*.' Thus far our purpose prospers. No man can pretend to forget two such centres as Pericles for the elder group, or Alexander of Macedon (the 'strong he-goat' of Jewish prophecy) for the junior. Round these two *foci*, in two different but adjacent centuries, gathered the total starry heavens, the galaxy, the Pantheon of Grecian intellect. . . . That we may still more severely search the relations in all points between the two systems, let us assign the chronological *locus* of each, because that will furnish another element towards the exact distribution of the chart representing the motion and the oscillations of human genius. Pericles had a very long administration. He was Prime-minister of Athens for upwards of one entire generation. He died in the year 429 before Christ, and in a very early stage of that great Peloponnesian war which was the one sole intestine war for Greece, affecting *every* nook and angle in the land. Now, in this long public life of Pericles, we are at liberty to fix on *any* year as his chronological *locus*. On good reasons, not called for in this place, we fix on the year 444 before Christ. This is too remarkable to be forgotten. *Four, four, four*, what in some games of cards is called a '*prial*' (we presume, by an elision of the first vowel, for *parial*), forms an era which no man can forget. It was the fifteenth year before the death of Pericles, and not far from the bisecting year of his political life. Now, passing to the other system, the *locus* of Alexander is quite as remarkable, as little liable to be forgotten when once indicated, and more easily determined, because selected from a narrower range of choice. The exact chronological *locus* of Alexander is 333 years before Christ. Everybody knows how brief was the career of this great

man: it terminated in the year 323 before Christ. But the *annus mirabilis* of his public life, the most effective and productive year throughout his Oriental anabasis, was the year 333 before Christ. Here we have another '*prial*,' a *prial* of threes, for the *locus* of Alexander, if properly corrected. Thus far the elements are settled, the chronological longitude and latitude of the two great planetary systems into which the Greek literature breaks up and distributes itself: 444 and 333 are the two central years for the two systems; allowing, therefore, an interspace of 111 years between the *foci* of each. . . . Passing onwards from Pericles, you find that all the rest in *his* system were men in the highest sense creative, absolutely setting the very first example, each in his particular walk of composition; themselves without previous models, and yet destined every man of them to become models for all after-generations; themselves without fathers or mothers, and yet having all posterity for their children. First come the three men *divini spiritus*, under a heavenly afflatus, Æschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, the creators of Tragedy out of a village mummerly; next comes Aristophanes, who breathed the breath of life into Comedy; then comes the great philosopher, Anaxagoras, who first theorized successfully on man and the world. Next come, whether great or not, the still more *famous* philosophers, Socrates, Plato, Zenophon; then comes, leaning upon Pericles, as sometimes Pericles leaned upon *him*, the divine artist, Phidias; and behind this immortal man walk Herodotus and Thucydides. What a procession to Eleusis would these men have formed! what a frieze, if some great artist could arrange it as dramatically as Chaucer has arranged the Pilgrimage to Canterbury! . . . Now, let us step on a hundred years forward. We are now within hail of Alexander, and a brilliant consistency of Grecian men that is by which *he* is surrounded. There are now exquisite masters of the more refined comedy; there are, again, great philosophers, for all the great schools are represented by able successors; and, above all others, there is the one philosopher who played with men's minds (according to Lord Bacon's comparison) as freely as ever his princely pupil with their persons—there is Aristotle. There are great orators; and, above all others, there is that orator whom succeeding generations (wisely or not) have adopted as the representative name for what is conceivable as oratorical perfection—there is Demosthenes. Aristotle and Demosthenes are in themselves bulwarks of power; many hosts lie in those two names.

For artists, again, to range against Phidias, there is Lysippus the sculptor, and there is Apelles the painter; for great captains and masters of strategic art, there is Alexander himself, with a glittering *cortège* of general officers, well qualified to wear the crowns which they will win, and to head the dynasties which they will found. Historians there are now, as in that former age; and, upon the whole, it cannot be denied that the 'turn-out' is showy and imposing. . . . Before comparing the second 'deposit' (geologically speaking) of Grecian genius with the first, let us consider what it was (if anything) that connected them. Here, reader, we would wish to put a question. Saving your presence, Did you ever see what is called a dumb-bell? We have; and know it by more painful evidence than that of sight. You, therefore, O reader! if personally cognisant of dumb-bells, we will remind, if not, we will inform, that it is a cylindrical bar of iron or lead, issuing at each end in a globe of the same metal, and usually it is sheathed in green baize. . . . Now, reader, it is under this image of the dumb-bell that we couch our allegory. Those globes at each end are the two systems or separate clusters of Greek literature; and that cylinder which connects them is the long man that ran into each system, binding the two together. Who was that? It was Isocrates. Great we cannot call him in conscience; and therefore, by way of compromise, we call him *long*, which, in one sense, he certainly was; for he lived through four-and-twenty Olympiads, each containing four solar years. He narrowly escaped being a hundred years old; and, though that did not carry him from centre to centre, yet, as each system might be supposed to pretend a radius each way of twenty years, he had, in fact, a full personal cognisance (and pretty equally) of the two systems, remote as they were, which composed the total world of Grecian genius. . . . Now, then, reader, you have arrived at that station from which you overlook the whole of Greek literature, as a few explanations will soon convince you. Where is Homer? where is Hesiod? you ask; where is Pindar? Homer and Hesiod lived 1000 years B.C., or, by the lowest computation, near 900. For anything that we know, they may have lived with Tubal Cain. At all events, they belong to no power or agency that set in motion the age of Pericles, or that operated on that age. Pindar, again, was a solitary emanation of some unknown influences, at Thebes, more than five hundred years before Christ. He may be referred to the same age as Pythagoras. These are all that can be cited *before* Per-

icles. Next, for the ages *after* Alexander, it is certain that Greece Proper was so much broken in spirit by the loss of her autonomy, dating from that era, as never again to have rallied sufficiently to produce a single man of genius—not one solitary writer who acted as a power upon the national mind. Callimachus was nobody, and not decidedly Grecian. Theocritus, a man of real genius in a limited way, is a Grecian in that sense only according to which an Anglo-American is an Englishman. Besides that, one swallow does not make a summer. Of any other writers, above all others of Menander, apparently a man of divine genius, we possess only a few wrecks; and of Anacreon, who must have been a poet of original power, we do not certainly know that we have even any wrecks. Of those which pass under his name not merely the authorship, but the era, is very questionable indeed. Plutarch and Lucian, the unlearned reader must understand, both belong to post-Christian ages. And, for all the Greek emigrants who may have written histories, such as we now value for their matter more than for their execution, one and all, they belong too much to Roman civilization that we should ever think of connecting them with native Greek literature. Polybius in the days of the second Scipio, Dion Cassius and Appian in the acme of Roman civility, are no more Grecian authors because they wrote in Greek than the Emperors Marcus Antoninus and Julian were other than Romans because, from monstrous coxcombry, they chose to write in Greek their barren memoranda.”—*Works*, X. 242–255.

It would be hopeless to seek to represent by extracts, even in this inadequate fashion, that very characteristic portion of De Quincey's writings of the generally historical kind which we have called his Historical Speculations and Researches. They must be read in their integrity. *The Casuistry of Roman Meals*, *Cicero*, *Judas Iscariot*, *The Essenes*, and *The Pagan Oracles*, may be especially recommended. They are admirable specimens of his boldness and acuteness in questioning received historical beliefs, and of his ingenuity in working out novelties or paradoxes. The drift of *The Casuistry of Roman Meals* is that the Romans, and indeed the ancients generally, had

no such regular meal early in the day as our modern breakfast, and that a whole coil of important social consequences depended on that one fact. In his *Cicero* he propounds a view of his own as to the character of the famous Roman orator and wit and his function in the struggle between Cæsar and Pompey. The paradox in *Judas Iscariot* is, that Judas was not the vulgar traitor of the popular conception, but a headstrong fanatic, who, having missed the true spiritual purport of Christ's mission, and attached himself to Christ in the expectation of a political revolution to be effected by Christ's assumption of a temporal kingship or championship of the Jewish race, had determined to precipitate matters by leaving Christ no room for hesitation or delay. In *The Essenes* the attempt is to show that there was no real or independent sect of that name among the Jews, all the confusion to the contrary having originated in a rascally invention of the historian Josephus. In *The Pagan Oracles* there is a contradiction of the tradition of a sudden paralysis of the Pagan ritual on the first appearance of Christianity, and a castigation of the early Christian writers for having invented the pious lie.

II. SPECULATIVE, DIDACTIC, AND CRITICAL.

While a speculative and critical element is discernible in almost all the papers now dismissed as in the main biographical or historical, and while some of the historical papers were regarded by De Quincey himself as typical examples of the speculative essay, it is of a different set of his papers that our classification obliges us to take account under the present heading. They also fall into subdivisions:

I. METAPHYSICAL, PSYCHOLOGICAL, AND ETHICAL:—In this subdivi-

sion, itself composite, but answering to what passes under the name of PHILOSOPHY in a general sense, may be included the following: *System of the Heavens as Revealed by Lord Rosse's Telescopes*; various papers or portions of papers relating to Kant, e. g., part of the *Letters to a Young Man whose Education has been Neglected*, the paper entitled *Kant in his Miscellaneous Essays*, and the translation of Kant's *Idea of a Universal History on a Cosmopolitical Plan*; the scraps entitled *Dreaming* and *The Palimpsest of the Human Brain*, in the "Sequel to the Confessions of an English Opium-eater" (Vol. XVI.); some of the scraps in the "Notes from the Pocket-book of a Late Opium-eater," e. g., *On Suicide*; and the articles entitled *Plato's Republic*, *Glance at the Works of Mackintosh*, *Casuistry*, *On War*, *National Temperance Movements*, *Presence of Mind*, and *The Juggernaut of Social Life*.

II. THEOLOGICAL:—*Protestantism, Miracles as Subjects of Testimony, On Christianity as an Organ of Political Movement*, and *Memorial Chronology on a New and more Apprehensible System*. This last, included in Vol. XVI., is an unfinished paper, posthumously published from the author's manuscript; and it contains little more than a clever and humorous introduction, in the form of an address to a young lady, with the beginning of what was intended to be a piece of Biblical criticism.

III. ENGLISH POLITICS:—*A Tory's Account of Toryism, Whiggism, and Radicalism; On the Political Parties of Modern England; Falsification of English History*.

IV. POLITICAL ECONOMY:—*Logic of Political Economy; Dialogues of Three Templars on Political Economy*; the scraps entitled *Malthus* and *Measure of Value* in the "Notes from the Pocket-book of a Late Opium-eater;" and the article entitled *California*.

V. LITERARY THEORY AND CRITICISM:—The large essays entitled *Rhetoric* and *Style* may be here noted again; and there may be associated with them, as expositions of general literary theory, the *Letters to a Young Man whose Education has been Neglected*, and the article entitled *Language* (which, despite the title, is really on *Style*). The more special articles of the same sort form a numerous series. Arranged in the chronological order of their subjects, they are as follows: *Theory of Greek Tragedy*, *The Antigone of Sophocles*, and *The Theban Sphinx*; *On the Knocking at the Gate in Macbeth*; the short critical paper entitled *Milton* (in Vol. VI.), and the other en-

titled *Milton versus Southey and Landor* (in Vol. XI.); the review entitled *Schlosser's Literary History of the Eighteenth Century*; the two critical articles on Pope, entitled *Alexander Pope* (in Vol. VIII.) and *Lord Carlisle on Pope* (in Vol. XII.); the article *Oliver Goldsmith* (slightly biographical, but chiefly critical); the paper on Carlyle's Translation of Wilhelm Meister, reprinted under the title *Goethe Reflected in his Novel of Wilhelm Meister*, with omission of the remarks on the translator (in Vol. XII.); the sketch *John Paul Fredrick Richter*, prefixed to the translated "Analects from Richter" (in Vol. XIII.); the essay *On Wordsworth's Poetry*; the *Notes on Godwin and Foster*, the slight little paper entitled *John Keats*, and the *Notes on Walter Savage Landor*. To these may be added *Orthographic Mutineers*, *The Art of Conversation*, the scrap *Walladmor*, and one or two of the scraps called "Notes from the Pocket-book of a Late Opium-eater."

To the harder varieties of Speculative Philosophy, it will be observed, De Quincey has contributed less of an original kind than might have been expected from his known private passion for metaphysical studies. If we except his *System of the Heavens*, which hints metaphysical ideas in the form of a splendid cosmological vision, and his *Palimpsest of the Human Brain*, which is full of psychological suggestion, he seems to have satisfied himself in this department by reports from Kant and recommendations of Kant to English attention. The accuracy of some of his statements about Kant, and indeed of his knowledge of Kant, has been called in question of late; but it remains to his credit that, in a singularly bleak and vapid period of the native British philosophizing, he had contracted such an admiration, all in all, for the great German transcendentalist. His translation of Kant's *Idea of a Universal History* was a feat in itself. That essay remains to this day the clearest argument for the possibility of a Science of History since Vico propounded the *Scienza Nuova*; and to have perceived the importance of

such an essay in the year 1824 was to be in possession of a philosophical notion of great value long before it was popular in Britain. That De Quincey contented himself so much with mere accounts of Kant personally, and literary glimpses of the nature of his speculations, may have been due to the fact that original philosophizing of the metaphysical and psychological kinds was not wanted in magazines and would not pay. He made amends, however, as our list will have shown, by a considerable quantity of writing on subjects of Speculative Ethics. His best essay of this kind is that entitled *Casuistry*. It was a favourite idea of De Quincey's that Moral Philosophy in recent times, especially in Protestant countries, has run too much upon generalities, avoiding too much those very *cases* of constant recurrence in life about which difficulties are likely to arise in practical conduct. Accordingly, in this essay, there is a discussion of duelling and the laws of honour, the legitimacy of suicide, proper behaviour to servants, the limits of the rule of veracity, &c., &c., all with lively historical illustrations. In the paper *On War* the necessary permanence of that agency in the world is asserted strongly, and a certain character of nobleness and beneficence claimed for it. There is less of dissent from current philanthropy in the article on *Temperance Movements*; but it will not give entire satisfaction. The article on *Plato's Republic* is a virulent attack upon a philosopher towards whom we should have expected to see De Quincey standing in an attitude of discipleship and veneration. This is owing chiefly to De Quincey's disgust with the moral heresies, in the matter of marriage and the like, on which Plato so coolly professes to found his imaginary commonwealth; and it is possible that, had he been treating Plato in respect of the sum total of his phil-

osophic and literary merits, we should have had a much more admiring estimate. As it is, one has to pity De Quincey rather than Plato in this unfortunate interview. He looks as petulant and small in his attack on Plato as he did in his attack on Goethe.

The expressly theological papers of De Quincey, with passages innumerable through his other writings, show that he took his stand on established Christian orthodoxy. He avowed his belief in a miraculous revelation from God to mankind, begun and continued in the history of the Jewish race, and consummated in the life of Christ and in the diffusion of Christianity by the Apostles. As a reasoned piece of Christian apologetics his answer to Hume's argument, entitled *Miracles as Subjects of Testimony*, does not seem to have won much regard from theologians, and, though very subtle, is certainly deficient in the homely quality which Hobbes called *bite*. His own religious faith, indeed, appears to have been very much of the nature of an inherited sentiment, independent of reasoning, and which he would not let reasoning disturb. In one respect, too, his theology was of what many theologians now would call a narrow and old-fashioned kind. There is no trace in him of that notion of a universal religious inspiration among the nations, and so of a certain respectability, greater or less, in all mythologies, which has been fostered by the modern science of religions. On the contrary, Christianity is with him the single divine revelation in the world, and he thinks and speaks of the Pagan religions, in the style of the old-fashioned theology, as simply false religions, horrid religions, inventions of the spirit of evil. How this is to be reconciled with his wide range of historical sympathy, and especially with his admiration of the achievements

of the Greek intellect and the grandeur of the Roman character, it might be difficult to say. Probably it was because he distinguished between those noble and admirable developments which human nature could work out for itself, and which therefore belong to humanity as such, and the more rare and spiritual possibilities which he believed actual revelation had woven into the web of humanity, and which were to be regarded as gifts from the supernatural. At all events, the matter stands as has been stated. In the same way, Mahometanism figures in his regard as of little worth, monotheistic certainly, and therefore superior to the Pagan creeds, but a spurious religion and partly stolen. Further, De Quincey's Christianity declares itself as deliberately of the Protestant species. With much respect for Roman Catholicism, he yet repudiates it as in great measure a corruption of the original system, which original system he finds reproduced in the Protestantism of the sixteenth century. His article entitled *Protestantism* is an exposition of his views in that matter, and is altogether a very able and important paper. If he has seemed narrow hitherto in his philosophy of religion, here, once within the bounds of his Protestantism, and engaged in defining Protestantism, he becomes broad enough. "The self-sufficingness of the Bible and the right of private judgment" are, he maintains, "the two great characters in which Protestantism commences," and the doctrines by which it distinguishes itself from the Church of Rome. Bound up in these doctrines, he maintains, is the duty of absolute religious toleration; and by this principle of absolute religious toleration, the right of the individual to think, print, and publish what he pleases, he abides with exemplary fidelity through all his writings, even while in skirmish with the free-thinkers for whom

he has the strongest personal disgust. But this is not all. He abjures *Bibliolatry*, or that kind of respect for the letter of the Bible which is founded on the notion of verbal inspiration, denying it to be a necessary tenet of Protestantism, or to be possible, indeed, for any scholarly understanding. It is not only, he maintains, that the notion of literal or verbal inspiration is broken down at once by recollection of the corruptions of the original text of the Scriptures, their various readings, and the fact that it is only in translations that the Scriptures exist for the masses of mankind in all countries. He addresses himself more emphatically to the alleged palpable errors in the substance and teachings of the Bible, its violations of history and chronology, its inconsistencies with modern science. Here he refuses at once that method of reconciling science with Scripture which proceeds by torture of texts into meanings different from those which they bore to the Hebrews or the Greeks who first read them. His bold principle is, that Science and the Bible cannot be reconciled in such matters, and that the desire to reconcile them indicates a most gross and carnal misconception of the very idea of a divine revelation. The principle may be given in his own words:

‘It is an obligation resting upon the Bible, if it is to be consistent with itself, that it should *refuse* to teach science; and, if the Bible ever *had* taught any one art, science, or process of life, it would have been asked, Is a divine mission abandoned suddenly for a human mission? By what caprice is this one science taught, and others not? Or these two, suppose, and not all? But an objection even deadlier would have followed. It is clear as is the purpose of daylight that the whole body of the arts and sciences comprises one vast machinery for the irritation and development of the human intellect. For this end they exist. To see God, therefore, descending into the arena of science, and contending, as it were, for his own prizes, by

teaching science in the Bible, would be to see him intercepting from their self-evident destination (viz, man's intellectual benefit) his own problems by solving them himself. No spectacle could more dishonour the divine idea, could more injure man under the mask of aiding him. *The Bible must not teach anything that man can teach himself.*"

The revelation of the Old and New Testaments is to be regarded, then, according to De Quincey, as a leaven of truths purely moral and spiritual, sent into the world by miracle precisely because man could never have found them out for himself, with a careful abstinence from any mixture of matter of ordinary knowledge in advance of what was already existent, and therefore with an adoption of all existing historical and scientific phrases and traditions. Hence *Bibliolatry*, in the sense of a belief in the immaculate correctness of the language and statements of the Bible on all subjects whatsoever, was no tenet of genuine Christianity, secure as every Christian ought to be that, whatever changes of conception on such subjects as the antiquity of the human race, or the system of the physical universe, might come with the progress of the human intelligence, the supernatural leaven would impregnate them as they came, and go on working. In this doctrine, of which De Quincey seems to have meditated a particular application in his unfinished papers entitled *Memorial Chronology*, he was substantially at one with Coleridge and Wordsworth. He was at one with them, too, in his affection for Church Establishments. In remarkable difference from his favourite Milton, who regarded the incorporation of Church and State as the cause of the vitiation of the supernatural leaven in the world, and scowled back with hatred on the Emperor Constantine as the beginner of that mischief, De Quincey con-

fessed to a special kindness for Constantine, precisely because that Emperor had conceived the idea of converting Christianity into a political agency. It was Constantine who had carried Christian teaching into effect in such institutions as hospitals and public provision for the poor; and the prospects of the world for the future were bound up with the possible extensions of the political influence of Christianity in similar directions. That is the subject of the essay entitled *On Christianity as an Organ of Political Movement*. In short, De Quincey is to be remembered, in his religious relations, as a staunch Church-of-England man of the broad school, not given to High-Church sacerdotalism, though with an æsthetic liking in his own case for a comely ritual.

In politics De Quincey was an English Tory. In the two papers entitled *A Tory's Account of Toryism, Whiggism, and Radicalism*, and *On the Political Parties of Modern England*, he avows his partisanship. Toryism asserts itself also in the article on Dr. Parr, and tinges some of the other papers. It is interesting, indeed, to observe how much of the "John Bull element," as Mr. Page calls it, there was, all in all, in the feeble little man. His patriotism was of the old type of the days of Pitt and Nelson. He exulted in the historic glories of England and her imperial ascendancy in so many parts of the globe, and would have had her do battle for any punctilio of honour, as readily as for any more visible interest, in her dealings with foreigners. He had a good deal of the old English anti-Gallican prejudice; and, though he has done justice, over and over again, to some of the finer characteristics of the French, the total effect of his remarks on the French, politically and intellectually, is irritating to the admirers of that great nation. He knew them only through books or by

casual observation of stray Frenchmen he met; for he was never out of the British Islands, and never experienced that sudden awakening of a positive affection for the French which comes infallibly from even a single visit to their lightsome capital. On the other hand, though Scotland was his home for so large a part of his life, he seems never to have contracted the least sympathy with anything distinctively Scottish. Even his Toryism was specially English or South-British. But, like all other parts of his creed, his Toryism was of a highly intellectual kind, with features of its own. In such questions, for example, as that of the continuance of flogging and other brutal forms of punishment in the army and navy and elsewhere, he parted company with the ordinary mass of Tories, leaving his curse with them in that particular, and went with the current of Radical sentiment and opinion. How far he was carried, by his candour of intellect and depth and accuracy of scholarship, from the ordinary rut of party commonplace, may be judged also from his little paper entitled *Falsification of English History*. It is a gallant little paper, and one of the best rebukes in our language to that systematic vilification of the Puritan Revolution, the English Commonwealth, and the Reign of Cromwell, which has come down in the Anglican mind as an inheritance from the Restoration, and still vulgarises so much of our scholarship and our literature.

The *Dialogues of the Three Templars* and the *Logic of Political Economy* are De Quincey's chief contributions to the literature of Economic Science. As to the literary deftness of the essay and the treatise there is no doubt. For cutting lucidity of exposition and beauty of style they are to be envied by most writers on Political Economy. This seems to have been felt by Mr. John Stuart Mill, who

mentions De Quincey with respect, and uses quotations from him thankfully in parts of his standard work. The question rather is, whether De Quincey has any title, such as he himself seemed to claim, to the character of an original thinker in the matter of the science. Mr. Mill's language in one place appears to negative this claim, though very gently; and the question has been re-opened, in De Quincey's interest, by Mr. Shadworth Hodgson in an essay entitled *De Quincey as Political Economist*. Enough here on that matter.

If De Quincey surpasses himself anywhere in his didactic papers, it is in those that concern Literary Theory and Criticism. No English writer has left a finer body of disquisition on the science and principles of Literature than will be found in De Quincey's general papers entitled *Rhetoric, Style, and Language*, and his *Letters to a Young Man*, together with his more particular articles entitled *Theory of Greek Tragedy, The Antigone of Sophocles, Milton, Milton versus Southey and Landor, Alexander Pope, Lord Carlisle on Pope, Schlosser's Literary History of the Eighteenth Century, and On Wordsworth's Poetry*. There, or elsewhere in De Quincey, will be found the last word, so far as there can be a last word, on some of the most important questions of style or literary art, and a treatment of literary questions throwing back into mere obsolete ineptitude the literary theories of such masters of the eighteenth century as Addison and Johnson, and of such of their successors as the acute Jeffrey and the robust but coarse-grained Whately. Goethe, the greatest literary critic that ever lived, was more comprehensive and universally tolerant; but De Quincey was *facile princeps*, to the extent of his touch, among the English critics of his generation. He acknowledged that he had received some

of his leading ideas in literary art from Wordsworth originally; but whatever he derived from Wordsworth was matured by so much independent reflection, and so modified by the peculiarities of his own temperament, that the result was a system of precepts differing from Wordsworth's in not a few points.

One of the best known of De Quincey's critical maxims is his distinction, after Wordsworth, between the Literature of Knowledge, which he would call Literature only by courtesy, and the Literature of Power, which alone he regarded as Literature proper. My belief is, that the distinction has been overworked in the form in which De Quincey put it forth, and that it would require a great deal of re-explication and modification to bring it into defensible and permanent shape. As it would be unpardonable, however, to omit this De Quinceyism in a sketch of De Quincey's opinions, here is one of the passages in which he expounds it:

"THE LITERATURE OF KNOWLEDGE AND THE LITERATURE OF POWER.

"In that great social organ which, collectively, we call Literature, there may be distinguished two separate offices that may blend and often do so, but capable, severally, of a severe insulation, and naturally fitted for reciprocal repulsion. There is, first, the literature of *knowledge*, and, secondly, the literature of *power*. The function of the first is to *teach*; the function of the second is to *move*: the first is a rudder, the second an oar or a sail. The first speaks to the mere discursive understanding; the second speaks ultimately, it may happen, to the higher understanding or reason, but always *through* affections of pleasure and sympathy. Remotely, it may travel towards an object seated in what Lord Bacon calls *dry* light; but, proximately, it does and must operate, else it ceases to be a literature of *power*, in and through that *humid* light which clothes itself in the mists and glittering iris of human passions, desires, and genial emotions. Men have so little reflected on the higher functions of literature as to find it a paradox if one should describe it as a mean or subordinate pur-

pose of books to give information. But this is a paradox only in the sense which makes it honourable to be paradoxical. Whenever we talk in ordinary language of seeking information or gaining knowledge, we understand the words as connected with something of absolute novelty. But it is the grandeur of all truth which *can* occupy a very high place in human interests that it is never absolutely novel to the meanest of minds: it exists eternally by way of germ or latent principle in the lowest as in the highest, needing to be developed, but never to be planted. To be capable of transplantation is the immediate criterion of a truth that ranges on a lower scale. Besides which, there is a rarer thing than truth—namely, *power*, or deep sympathy with truth. . . . Were it not that human sensibilities are ventilated and continually called out into exercise by the great phenomena of infancy, or of real life as it moves through chance and change, or of literature as it re-combines these elements in the mimicries of poetry, romance, &c., it is certain that, like any animal power or muscular energy falling into disuse, all such sensibilities would gradually drop and dwindle. It is in relation to these great *moral* capacities of man that the literature of power, as contradistinguished from that of knowledge, lives and has its field of action. It is concerned with what is highest in man; for the Scriptures themselves never condescended to deal, by suggestion or co-operation, with the mere discursive understanding: when speaking of man in his intellectual capacity, the Scriptures speak not of the understanding, but of '*the understanding heart*'—making the heart, *i. e.*, the great intuitive (or non-discursive) organ, to be the interchangeable formula for man in his highest state of capacity for the infinite. Tragedy, romance, fairy tale, or epopee, all alike restore to man's mind the ideals of justice, of hope, of truth, of mercy, of retribution, which else (left to the support of daily life in its realities) would languish for want of sufficient illustration. . . . Hence the pre-eminency over all authors that merely *teach* of the meanest that *moves*, or that teaches, if at all, indirectly by moving. The very highest work that has ever existed in the literature of knowledge is but a *provisional* work, a book upon trial and sufferance, and *quandiu bene se gesserit*. Let its teaching be even partially revised, let it be but expanded, nay, let its teaching be but placed in a better order, and instantly it is superseded. Whereas the feeblest works in the literature of power, surviving at all, survive as finished and unalterable amongst men. For instance,

the *Principia* of Sir Isaac Newton was a book *militant* on earth from the first. In all stages of its progress it would have to fight for its existence—first, as regards absolute truth; secondly, when that combat was over, as regards its form or mode of presenting the truth. And, as soon as a La Place, or anybody else, builds higher upon the foundations laid by this book, effectually he throws it out of the sunshine into decay and darkness; by weapons even from this book he superannuates and destroys this book, so that soon the name of Newton remains as a mere *nominis umbra*, but his book, as a living power, has transmigrated into other forms. Now, on the contrary, the *Iliad*, the *Prometheus* of *Æschylus*, the *Othello* or *King Lear*, the *Hamlet* or *Macbeth*, or the *Paradise Lost*, are not militant, but triumphant for ever, as long as the languages exist in which they speak or can be taught to speak. They never *can* transmigrate into new incarnations. To reproduce *them* in new forms or variations, even if in some things they should be improved, would be to plagiarize. A good steam-engine is properly superseded by a better. But one lovely pastoral valley is not superseded by another, nor a statue of Praxiteles by a statue of Michael Angelo.”—*Works*, VIII. 5-9.

III. IMAGINATIVE WRITINGS AND PROSE POETRY.

In this class may be reckoned the following:

I. HUMOROUS EXTRAVAGANZAS:—The paragon in this kind is, of course, *Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts*. There are, however, occasional passages of frolicsome invention through the other papers; and the entire paper *Sortilege and Astrology* may be taken as a *jeu d'esprit* of the same sort.

II. INCIDENTS OF REAL LIFE AND PASSAGES OF HISTORY TREATED IMAGINATIVELY:—In addition to the poetic versions of incidents from real life that are interwrought with the expressly autobiographic writings, there ought to be mentioned specially the paper entitled *Early Memorials of Grasmere*. It is the story of the loss of two peasants, a husband and his wife, among the hills, during a snow-storm in the Lake District, in the year 1807. In the same group, on grounds of literary principle, may be reckoned the story called *The Spanish Military Nun* and the paper entitled *Joan of Arc*. As has been already hinted, *The Revolt of the Tartars* might rank in the same high company.

III. NOVELETTES AND ROMANCES:—Chief among these is De Quin-

cey's one-volume novel or romance, *Klosterheim*, published in 1832, and unfortunately not included in the edition of his collected works, nor accessible at present in any form, to any of her Majesty's subjects, except by importation of an American reprint. In connexion with this independent attempt in prose fiction, we may remember the short story or novelette called *The Avenger* (reprinted in Vol. XVI. from *Blackwood's Magazine* of 1838) and *Walladmor*, the pseudo-Waverley Novel of 1824, which De Quincey translated from the German. There are, besides, some novelettes from the German, reprinted in the collective edition.

IV. PROSE PHANTASIES AND LYRICS :—Although De Quincey ranked the whole of his *Confessions* as properly an example of that "mode of impassioned prose" in which he thought there had been few or no precedents in English, it is enough here to remember those parts of the *Confessions* which may be distinguished as "dream phantasies." To be added, under our present heading (besides passages in the *Autobiographic Sketches*), are *The Daughter of Lebanon*, the extraordinary paper in three parts called *The English Mail Coach*, and the little cluster of fragments called *Suspiria de Profundis* (i. e., "Sighs from the Depths"), being a *Sequel to the Confessions of an English Opium-eater*. In fact, however, only three of the six fragments there gathered under the common name of "Suspiria" are either "lyrics" or "phantasies," the rest being critical or psychological. The three entitled to a place here are those entitled *Levana* and *Our Ladies of Sorrow, Savannah-la-Mar*, and *Memorial Suspiria*.

The celebrity of the essay *On Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts* is not surprising. The ghastly originality of the conception, the humorous irony with which it is sustained by stroke after stroke, and the mad frenzy of the closing scene, where the assembled club of amateurs in murder, with Toad-in-the-hole leading them, drink their toasts and sing their chorus in honour of certain superlative specimens of their favourite art, leave an impression altogether exceptional, as of pleasure mixed illegitimately with the forbidden and horrible. For a lighter and more genial specimen of De Quincey in his

whimsical vein, *Sortilege and Astrology* may be cordially recommended. To pass from such papers to *Early Memorials of Grasmere*, *The Spanish Military Nun*, and *Joan of Arc*, gives one a fresh idea of the versatility of his powers. The first, describing winter among the English Lakes, and telling the tragic story of George and Sarah Green, and of the bravery of their little girl left in charge of the cottage to which they were never to return alive, has all the mournful beauty of a commemorative prose-poem. The second, which is a narrative, from historical materials, of the adventures of a daring Spanish girl, in man's disguise, first in Spain and then in the Spanish parts of the new world, in the beginning of the seventeenth century, is in De Quincey's most characteristic style of mingled humour and earnestness, and has all the fascination of one of the best of the Spanish *picaresque* romances. The paper on Joan of Arc, though brief, is nobly perfect. "What is to be thought of *her*? What is to be thought of the poor shepherd girl from the hills and forests of Lorraine, that, like the Hebrew shepherd boy from the hills and forests of Judea, rose suddenly out of the quiet, out of the safety, out of the religious inspiration, rooted in deep pastoral solitudes, to a station in the van of armies, and to the more perilous station at the right hand of kings?" Opening in this strain of poetic solemnity, the paper maintains the same high tone throughout; and, if it does not leave the question answered by enshrining the image of the Maid of Orleans in a sufficient vision of glory, there is no such answer in the English language.

De Quincey included in his collected works two short tales of clever humour, called *The Incognito*, or *Count Fitzhum*, and *The King of Hayti*, and a third, called *The*

Dice, a short story of devilry and black art, describing the first as "translated from the German of Dr. Schultze," and the other two merely as "from the German." Passing these and a fourth tale, called *The Fatal Marksmen*, which is somewhat in the style of the third, and seems also to be from the German (though that is not stated), we have, as the single original novelette of De Quincey among the collected works, the strange piece called *The Avenger*. It is a story, wholly fantastic and sensational, but quite in De Quincey's vein, of a series of appalling and mysterious murders supposed to happen in a German town in the year 1816, and of the astounding discovery at last that they have all been the work of a certain magnificent youth, Maximilian Wyndham, of mixed English and Jewish descent, and of immense wealth, who had come to reside in the town, in the house of one of the University professors, with high Russian credentials and universal acceptance among the citizens. He had come thither nominally to complete his studies, but really in pursuit of a secret scheme of vengeance upon those of the inhabitants who had been concerned in certain deadly injuries and dishonours done to his family, and especially to his Jewish mother. The story does not appear to have been much read; and admirers of De Quincey may judge from this description of it whether it is worth looking up. It may be even more necessary to give some account of *Klosterheim, or the Masque*.

As originally published by Blackwood in 1832, it was a small prettily-printed volume of 305 pages, without De Quincey's name after the title, but only the words "By the English Opium-eater." It would make about half a volume in the collective edition of the works, were it included there.

The scene of the story is an imaginary German city, Klosterheim, with its forest-neighbourhood; and the time is the winter of 1633, with part of the year 1634, or just at that point of the great Thirty Years' War when, after the death of Gustavus Adolphus, his Swedish generals are maintaining the war against the Imperialists, and all Germany is in confusion and misery with the marchings and counter-marchings, the ravagings and counter-ravagings, of the opposed armies. The Klosterheimers, as good Catholics, are mainly in sympathy with the Imperialists, but are in the peculiar predicament of being subject to a gloomy and tyrannical Landgrave, who, though a bigoted Roman Catholic, has reasons of his own for cultivating the Swedish alliance, and is in fact in correspondence with the Swedes. A leading spirit among them, and especially among the University students, is a certain splendid soldier-youth, Maximilian, a stranger from a distance. So, when the Klosterheimers are in excitement over the approach to their city, through the forest, of a travelling mass of pilgrims, under Imperialist convoy, all the way from Vienna, and over the chances that the poor pilgrims may be attacked and cut to pieces by a certain brutal Holkerstein, the head of a host of marauders who prowl through the forest, who but this Maximilian is the man to execute the general desire of Klosterheim by evading the orders of the cruel Landgrave and carrying armed aid to the pilgrims? Well that he has done so; for in the midst of the pilgrim-cavalcade, and the chief personage in it, is his own lady-love, the noble Paulina, a relative of the Emperor, and entrusted by him with despatches. The lovers meet; and, save for a night-alarm, in the course of which the portmanteau of secret despatches is abstracted by robbers from Lady Paulina's carriage, there is no accident till

the pilgrims are close to Klosterheim. There, in the night-time, Holkerstein and his host of marauders do fall upon them. There is a dreadful night-battle; and, though the marauding host is beaten off, chiefly by the heroic valour of Maximilian, it is but a wreck of the pilgrim-army that enters Klosterheim on the morrow—and then, alas! without Maximilian among them. He has been carried away by the marauders, a wounded prisoner. The residue of the poor pilgrims are dispersed through the city somehow for hospitality, and the doleful Lady Paulina takes up her abode in the great abbey, close to the Landgrave's palace. Then, for a while, we are among the Klosterheimers, and called upon to pity them. For the gloomy Landgrave, always a tyrant, now revels in acts of tyranny and cruelty utterly indiscriminate and capricious, maddened by the goad of some new motive, which is not explained, but which we connect with intelligence he has obtained from the abstracted imperial despatches. There are arrests of students and citizens; all are in consternation; no one knows what will happen next. Suddenly, however, a counter-agency is at work in Klosterheim, baffling and bewildering the Landgrave and his wily Italian minister Adorni. This is a certain mysterious being, whether human or supernatural no one can tell, who calls himself "The Masque," and seems omnipresent and resistless. He appears when and where he likes, passes through bolts and bars, leaves messages to the Landgrave nailed up in public places, and defies his police. Houses are entered; citizens disappear, sometimes with signs of scuffle and bloodshed left in their rooms; and, as these victims of "The Masque" are not exclusively from the ranks of the Landgrave's partisans, it becomes doubtful whether the mysterious being

has any political purpose, or is a mere demon of general malignity. But, evidently, the Landgrave is his main mark; and it is in the palace of the Landgrave that he makes his presence and his power most daringly felt. How, for example, he appeared there at a great masked ball, to which exactly twelve hundred persons had been invited by numbered tickets; how, when the twelve hundred had been, by arrangement, counted off in the hall, and aggregated apart, he was seen in majestic and solitary composure, leaning against a marble column, and it seemed as if the Landgrave and Adorni had but to give the word to their myrmidons to clutch him; but how there was nothing of that expected catastrophe, but only a scornful disappearance of the awful figure, as if in cloud or smoke, after some words from his hollow voice which left the Landgrave trembling: for all this, and much more, there must be application inside the little volume itself. In reading it, you are as if in the heart of one of Mrs. Radcliffe's novels, with the usual paraphernalia of cloaks, nodding plumes, ghostly sounds, labyrinthine corridors and secret passages, pictures of ancestors on the walls, and the rest of it; and you long to be out of such a curiosity-shop of jumbled incredibilities, and to know the *dénouement*. That does not come till after new episodes of danger to Lady Paulina, new coils of marvel round the mysterious "Masque," and a second great assembly in the palace, with a vast mechanism of new preparations by the infuriated Landgrave for the discomfiture of his adversary. Let these be supposed; and let it be supposed that the 6th of September, 1634, has passed, and that the Swedes have been routed and the Imperialists triumphant in the great battle of Nördlingen. What need, then, for further mystery? The hour has come for that revolution in Klosterheim

which the Emperor himself had devised from Vienna, and manipulated in the secret despatches he had sent by the Lady Paulina. All is revealed in a crash. Maximilian is the true Landgrave, the hitherto undivulged son of the last good Landgrave; and the present usurper had come to his power by the murder of Maximilian's father, and maintained it by other crimes. In the crash of this revelation the gloomy usurper sinks, the last blow to the wretched man being the death of his daughter by a mistake of his own murderous order for the execution of the Lady Paulina. Maximilian marries Paulina; there are other more minute solutions and surprises; and the Klosterheimers, under their new Landgrave, are again a happy people. But who was the mysterious "Masque?" Who but Maximilian himself? Trap-doors and subterranean passages, his own dexterity, and collusion with the requisite number of citizens and students, and with an old seneschal of the tyrant, had done the whole business; and the only blood really shed in the course of it had been that of the poor seneschal, betrayed by accident, and stabbed by his master.

Such is De Quincey's one-volume romance, a poor performance, doubtless for the sake of a little money, about the time when he settled in Edinburgh. Was he ashamed of it afterwards, that he did not reprint it? There was no necessity for that; for, though the story does not show the craft of a Sir Walter Scott, it is by no means bad of its preposterous kind. The style, at all events, is remarkably careful, with a marble beauty of sentence that makes one linger as one reads.

There remains to be noticed, in the last place, that very special portion of De Quincey's writings of the imaginative order for which he claimed distinction above the rest, as illustrating "a mode of impassioned prose" but slightly

represented before in English Literature. It may be questioned, however, whether the pieces for which he claimed this distinction are described most exactly by the phrase "impassioned prose." Their peculiarity is not so much that they are impassioned in any ordinary sense as that they are imaginative or poetical after a very definite and rather rare sort. It was one of the distinctions of De Quincey's intellect that it could pass from that ordinary or discursive exercise of itself which consists in expounding, reasoning, or investigating, to that poetic exercise of itself which consists in the formation of visions or phantasies; and it did, in fact, so pass on those occasions more particularly when it was moved by pathos or by the feeling of the mysterious and awful. What is most observable, therefore, in the pieces under notice is, that they exhibit the operation of those two constitutional kinds of emotion upon De Quincey's *intellectual* activity, transmuting it from the common or discursive mode to that called poetic imagination. Inasmuch as it is the implicated feeling or sentiment that moves the intellectual process, and inasmuch as there are marks of this in the rhythmical or lyrical character of the result, there is no great harm in calling that result impassioned prose, especially if we keep to the limitation stipulated by De Quincey's own phrase, "*a mode of impassioned prose*;" but it is better, all in all, to define the writings under consideration as examples of a peculiar "mode of imaginative prose," and, if further definition is wanted of this peculiar mode of prose poetry, to call it *Prose Phantasy and Lyric*, or *Lyrical Prose Phantasy*. De Quincey was consciously and deliberately an artist in this form of prose poetry, and has left specimens of it that have very few parallels in English. One ought to remember, however, how much he must have been influenced by

the previous example of Jean Paul Richter. Of his admiration of the famous German before he had himself begun his career of literature there is proof in his article on Richter published in the *London Magazine* in December, 1821, just after the appearance of his *Confessions* in their first form in the same magazine; and one observes that among the translated "analects" from Richter which accompanied or followed that article, and were intended to introduce Richter to the English public, were *The Happy Life of a Parish Priest in Sweden* and the *Dream upon the Universe*, both of them specimens of Richter's peculiar art of prose phantasy. There can be no doubt that Richter's example in such pieces influenced De Quincey permanently. But, though he may have learnt something from Richter, he was an original master in the same art.

One might go back here on his *Joan of Arc*, and some of the other writings of which account has been already taken, and claim for them, or for parts of them, fresh recognition in our present connexion. But let us confine ourselves to the writings to which De Quincey seems to have pointed more especially, and which have been already enumerated.

To the famous passages of "dream-phantasy" in the *Opium Confessions* we need not re-advert farther than to say that, extraordinary as they are as a whole, one may fairly object to parts of them, as to some of the similar dream-phantasies in Richter, that they fail by too much obtrusion of artistic self-consciousness in their construction, and sometimes also by a swooning of the power of clear and consecutive vision in a mere piling and excess of imagery and sound. The stroke on the mind at the time is not always equal to the look of the apparatus for inflicting it; and the memory does not retain a sufficient scar. No such objection can be urged against *The Daughter of*

Lebanon, a fine visionary lyric of seven pages, figuring an early and miraculous conversion to Christianity in the person of an ideal girl of Damascus. Nor would any of De Quincey's readers give up the first two sections of *The English Mail Coach*, sub-titled "The Glory of Motion" and "The Vision of Sudden Death." There is nothing in Jean Paul quite like these.

In the first we are back in the old days between Trafalgar and Waterloo. Drawn up at the General Post-office, in Lombard Street, and waiting for the hour to start, we see His Majesty's mails—carriages, harness, horses, lamps, the dresses of driver and guard, all in the perfection of English equipment, and, if there has been news that day of a great victory, then the laurels, the oak-leaves, the flowers, the ribbons, in addition. Seating ourselves beside the driver on one of the mails, we begin our journey of three hundred miles along one of the great roads, north or west, leaving Lombard Street at a quarter past eight in the evening. How, once out into the country, we shoot along, horses at gallop, the breeze in our faces, hedges and trees and fields and homesteads rushing past us in the darkness which we and our lamps are cleaving like a fiery arrow! How, at every stopping-station, there are the lights and bustle at the inn-door, and the laurels and other bedizements we carry are seen ere we have well stopped, and we shout "Badajoz" or "Salamanca" in explanation, or whatever else may have been the last victory, and the hostlers and other inn-folk take up the huzza, and it is one round of congratulation and hand-shaking while we stay! But, punctually to the minute, having changed horses, and left the news palpitating in that neighbourhood, we are on again, horses at gallop, coach-lamps burning, and we beside the driver on the front seat, conscious that we are carrying

the same news with us to neighbourhoods still ahead! On, on, stage after stage, in the same fashion, still cleaving the darkness, the horse-hoofs always audible and the coach-lamps always burning, till the darkness yields to a silver glimmer and the glimmer to the glare of day! Such is the series of sensations De Quincey has contrived to give us in his prose-poem called "The Glory of Motion." In the sequel, entitled "The Vision of Sudden Death," we are still on the same night journey by coach, or rather on one later night journey on the Northern road between sixty and seventy years ago, with the difference that the glory of motion is now turned into horror. Prosaically described, the paper is a recollection of a fatal accident by collision of the mail, in a very dark part of the road, with a solitary vehicle containing two persons, one of them a woman; but it is for the paper itself to show what the incident becomes in De Quincey's hands. It passes into a third paper, still under the same general title of *The English Mail Coach*; which third paper, indeed, bears the extraordinary sub-title of "Dream-Fugue, founded on the preceding theme of Sudden Death." I cannot say that this "dream-fugue," which is offered as a lyrical finale to the little series, in visionary coherence with the preceding pieces, accomplishes its purpose very successfully. It is liable to the objection which may be urged, as we have said, against other specimens of De Quincey in the peculiar art of dream-phantasy. The artifice is too apparent, and the meaning is all but lost in a mere vague of music.

Of the three scraps of the *Suspiria* that are entitled to rank among the lyrical prose phantasies, viz., *Levana and Our Ladies of Sorrow*, *Savannah-la-Mar*, and *Memorial Suspiria*, only the first is of much importance. But that scrap, written in De Quincey's later life, is of as high im-

portance as anything he ever wrote. It is, perhaps, the highest and finest thing, and also the most constitutionally significant, in all De Quincey. Fortunately, the essential core of it can be quoted entire. All that it is necessary to premise is, that "Levana" was the Roman Goddess of Education, the divinity who was supposed to "lift up" every newly-born human being from the earth in token that it should live, and to rule the influences to which it should be subject thenceforth till its character should be fully formed :

"THE THREE LADIES OF SORROW.

"I know them thoroughly, and have walked in all their kingdoms. Three sisters they are, of one mysterious household; and their paths are wide apart; but of their dominion there is no end. Them I saw often conversing with Levana, and sometimes about myself. Do they talk, then? Oh, no! Mighty phantoms like these disdain the infirmities of language. They may utter voices through the organs of man when they dwell in human hearts, but amongst themselves there is no voice nor sound; eternal silence reigns in *their* kingdoms. They spoke not, as they talked with Levana; they whispered not; they sang not; though oftentimes methought they *might* have sung: for I upon earth had heard their mysteries oftentimes deciphered by harp and timbrel, by dulcimer and organ. Like God, whose servants they are, they utter their pleasure, not by sounds that perish, or by words that go astray, but by signs in heaven, by changes on earth, by pulses in secret rivers, heraldries painted in darkness, and hieroglyphics written on the tablets of the brain. *They* wheeled in mazes; *I* spelled the steps. *They* telegraphed from afar; *I* read the signals. *They* conspired together; and on the mirrors of darkness *my* eye traced the plots. *Theirs* were the symbols; *mine* are the words.

"What is it the sisters are? What is it that they do? Let me describe their form and their presence: if form it were that still fluctuated in its outline, or presence it were that for ever advanced to the front or for ever receded amongst shades.

"The eldest of the three is named *Mater Lachrymarum*, Our Lady of Tears. She it is that night and day raves and moans, calling for

vanished faces. She stood in Rama, where a voice was heard of lamentation—Rachel weeping for her children, and refusing to be comforted. She it was that stood in Bethlehem on the night when Herod's sword swept its nurseries of innocents, and the little feet were stiffened for ever, which, heard at times as they tottered along floors overhead, woke pulses of love in household hearts that were not unmarked in heaven. Her eyes are sweet and subtle, wild and sleepy, by turns; oftentimes rising to the clouds, oftentimes challenging the heavens. She wears a diadem round her head. And I knew by childish memories that she could go abroad upon the winds, when she heard the sobbing of litanies or the thundering of organs, and when she beheld the mustering of summer clouds. This sister, the eldest, it is that carries keys more than papal at her girdle, which open every cottage and every palace. She, to my knowledge, sat all last summer by the bedside of the blind beggar, him that so often and so gladly I talked with, whose pious daughter, eight years old, with the sunny countenance, resisted the temptations of play and village mirth to travel all day long on dusty roads with her afflicted father. For this did God send her a great reward. In the spring time of the year, and whilst her own spring was budding, he recalled her to himself. But her blind father mourns for ever over *her*; still he dreams at midnight that the little guiding hand is locked within his own; and still he awakens to a darkness that is now within a second and a deeper darkness. This *Mater Lachrymarum* also has been sitting all this winter of 1844-5 within the bedchamber of the Czar, bringing before his eyes a daughter, not less pious, that vanished to God not less suddenly, and left behind her a darkness not less profound. By the power of the keys it is that Our Lady of Tears glides, a ghostly intruder, into the chambers of sleepless men, sleepless women, sleepless children, from Ganges to the Nile, from Nile to Mississippi. And her, because she is the first-born of her house, and has the widest empire, let us honour with the title of Madonna.

"The second sister is called *Mater Suspiriorum*, Our Lady of Sighs. She never scales the clouds, nor walks abroad upon the winds. She wears no diadem. And her eyes, if they were ever seen, would be neither sweet nor subtle; no man could read their story; they would be found filled with perishing dreams, and with wrecks of forgotten delirium. But she raises not her eyes; her head, on which sits a dilapidated turban, droops for ever, for ever

fastens on the dust. She weeps not. She groans not. But she sighs inaudibly at intervals. Her sister, Madonna, is oftentimes stormy and frantic, raging in the highest against heaven, and demanding back her darlings. But Our Lady of Sighs never clamours, never defies, dreams not of rebellious aspirations. She is humble to abjectness. Hers is the meekness that belongs to the hopeless. Murmur she may, but it is in her sleep. Whisper she may, but it is to herself in the twilight. Mutter she does at times, but it is in solitary places that are desolate as she is desolate, in ruined cities, and when the sun has gone down to his rest. This sister is the visitor of the Pariah, of the Jew, of the bondsman to the oar in the Mediterranean galleys; of the English criminal in Norfolk Island, blotted out from the books of remembrance in sweet far-off England; of the baffled penitent reverting his eyes for ever upon a solitary grave, which to him seems the altar overthrown of some past and bloody sacrifice, on which altar no oblations can now be availing, whether towards pardon that he might implore, or towards reparation that he might attempt. Every slave that at noonday looks up to the tropical sun with timid reproach, as he points with one hand to the earth, our general mother, but for *him* a step-mother—as he points with the other hand to the Bible, our general teacher, but against *him* sealed and sequestered; every woman sitting in darkness, without love to shelter her head, or hope to illumine her solitude, because the heaven-born instincts kindling in her nature germs of holy affections, which God implanted in her womanly bosom, having been stifled by social necessities, now burn sullenly to waste, like sepulchral lamps amongst the ancients; every nun defrauded of her unreturning May-time by wicked kinsmen, whom God will judge; all that are betrayed, and all that are rejected; outcasts by traditionary law, and children of hereditary disgrace—all these walk with Our Lady of Sighs. She also carries a key, but she needs it little. For her kingdom is chiefly amongst the tents of Shem, and the houseless vagrant of every clime. Yet in the very highest walks of man she finds chapels of her own; and even in glorious England there are some that, to the world, carry their heads as proudly as the reindeer, who yet secretly have received her mark upon their foreheads.

“But the third sister, who is also the youngest—! Hush! whisper whilst we talk of *her*! Her kingdom is not large, or else no flesh should live; but within that kingdom all power is hers. Her head,

turreted like that of Cybele, rises almost beyond the reach of sight. She droops not; and her eyes, rising so high, *might* be hidden by distance. But, being what they are, they cannot be hidden; through the treble veil of crape which she wears, the fierce light of a blazing misery, that rests not for matins or for vespers, for noon of day or noon of night, for ebbing or for flowing tide, may be read from the very ground. She is the defier of God. She is also the mother of lunacies and the suggestress of suicides. Deep lie the roots of her power, but narrow is the nation that she rules. For she can approach only those in whom a profound nature has been upheaved by central convulsions, in whom the heart trembles and the brain rocks under conspiracies of tempest from without and tempest from within. Madonna moves with uncertain steps, fast or slow, but still with tragic grace. Our Lady of Sighs creeps timidly and stealthily. But this youngest sister moves with incalculable motions, bounding, and with tiger's leaps. She carries no key; for, though coming rarely amongst men, she storms all doors at which she is permitted to enter at all. And *her* name is *Mater Tenebrarum*, Our Lady of Darkness."

This is prose-poetry; but it is more. It is a permanent addition to the mythology of the human race. As the Graces are three, as the Fates are three, as the Furies are three, as the Muses were originally three, so may the varieties and degrees of misery that there are in the world, and the proportions of their distribution among mankind, be represented to the human imagination for ever by De Quincey's Three Ladies of Sorrow and his sketch of their figures and kingdoms.

THE END.

CHAP. XII.

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